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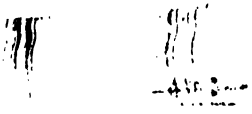

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Charlie among the Elves. *Front.*

MOONSHINE

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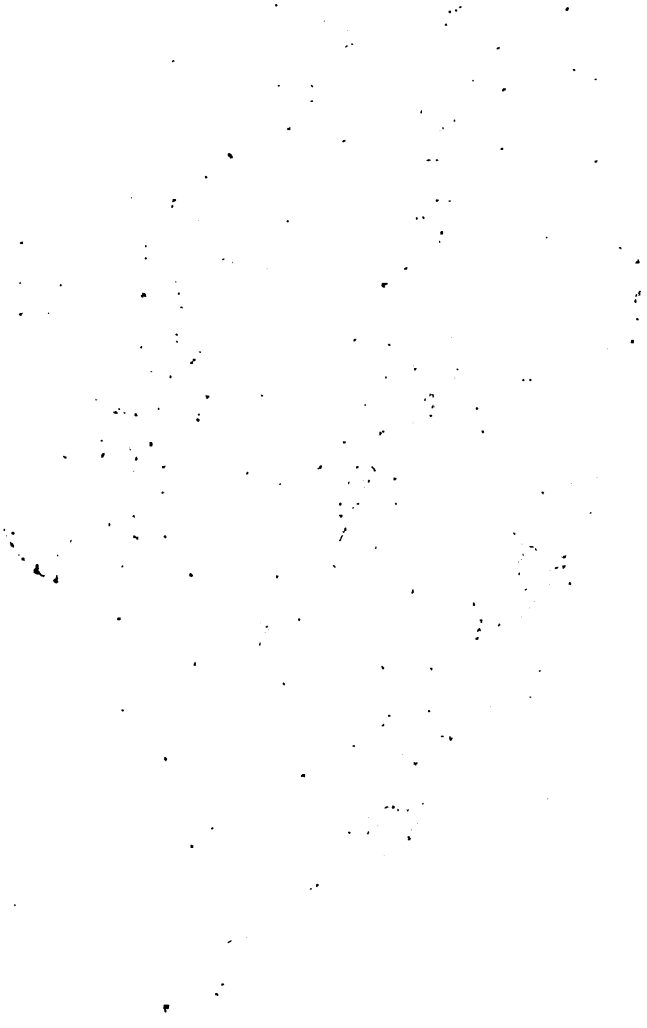

MOONSHINE.

Fairy Stories

BY

E. H. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN, M.P.

Author of "Stories for my Children," and "Crackers for Christmas."

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ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM BRUNTON.

London and New York:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1871.

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LONDON
R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS,
BREAD STREET HILL.

TO THE

CHILDREN OF MERRY ENGLAND,

OF ALL SIZES AND AGES,

This Book is Lovingly Dedicated

BY

THE AUTHOR.

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

So many of you have read my two Books, "Stories for my Children," and "Crackers for Christmas," that I am tempted to try you with a third. Some of the wise people who write in newspapers and reviews want to persuade me that there are no such things as Ogres, and that the days of Fairies are past and gone. I have not seen an ogre very lately, so perhaps they may be right so far;

but they must be poor, dull, heavy-brained people not to believe in the dear little Fairies! You and I know better, at all events, and in the warm summer evenings when the sun has gone to bed and all is calm and still—in the bright, fresh spring mornings, before the busy world is awake and stirring—in the autumn woodlands, when the brown tint has just begun to darken the green leaves—and in the winter, when the curtains are drawn close and the logs of wood crackle on the hearth and make the merry sparks fly upwards like spirits just set free from their earthly prison—at all these times *we* know that the Fairies are abroad, tender and sprightly little Elves, who put merry thoughts into our hearts, tempered always by kind and loving feelings, such as bless those to whom they come, and make all around them happy and cheerful. Let us love the little Elves still, my children, and keep our childish fondness for them as long as we may. You will find in this book one or two old friends brought out in new garments. Why not? Mutton is mutton all the world over; but if out of the ancient roast mutton of the "Three Wishes" and the "Fairy Godmother" I have made "a haricot" and an

"Irish stew" and called them "Potter's Gift" and "Mulligatawny," I don't see that anybody has a right to complain. And in spite of the dull and learned people who object, I have given you an Ogre, a Dwarf, a Witch, a Wizard, quantities of Elves and Fairies, and several animals, who speak like mortal men and women. So I hope you will like the book, and think kindly of the Author, who loves you all well, and does his best to put pleasant, happy thoughts into your hearts as you read his stories.

I am, my dear Children,

Your faithful Friend,

E. H. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN.

PREFACE.

I DON'T know why it is, but there is something to me very cheery and pleasant in a good old-fashioned fall of snow. One ought to be sorry, of course, for the poor people who cannot get to their work whilst the ground is covered up, and I don't mean to say that I wish the snow to lie upon the face of the earth day after day, and cause the distress which follows upon want of work. But I *do* love to see the great white flakes coming steadily down, and a "white world" always seems proper and natural for a few days at Christmas time. And whenever I see these flakes, as I stand at the window and look out upon them, they remind me of fairy tales and strange legends of olden days, and carry me back to early, happy Christmas times; when bright fires and bright faces, merry thoughts and merry words, endless plans for amusement planned by kind and loving hearts,—all contributed to make for my childhood a happy present, and to build up for it memories

for the then distant future, which will never fade and die away till I myself shall fade and die away too from mortal things. And so, by some strange freak of fancy, I had determined to call my new book after my old friends the Snow Flakes; and if anybody says that the title has nothing to do with the book, I can only say that he is a clever fellow, and quite right! Snow-flakes and fairy tales both come properly at Christmas time, and that is all I can say about the matter. Suddenly, however, I discovered that an American book was already called by this name; and as I did not want to have another High Commission appointed to decide whether the author would have to be compensated if I took his title, I gave in at once and changed the name of my book. After all, there was some objection to the first title, for the snow-flakes melt and pass away with Christmas, and no one wishes to see them after Winter has had his fair reign, and Spring has begun to dawn upon us with buds and birds'-nests. Not so, I hope, with my Fairy Tales—they are written for all seasons; and I have tried to give them something of the freshness of spring, the warmth of summer, and the mellowness of autumn, as well as the jovial, genial spirit of Old Father Christmas.

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FAIRY TALES.

I.

CHARLIE AMONG THE ELVES.

ONCE upon a time there was a little Boy named Charlie. He was very fond of driving his hoop along the gravel-walks in his father's garden, and of trying how long he could keep it up; and as it was a good hoop, and he was an active Boy, he could do so as long as most boys of his own age. Indeed, sometimes he kept it going so long, and ran with it so far, that he got quite out of sight of his nursery-maid, Jane, and she would come puffing and blowing after him, rather angry at his proceedings.

His Mamma had given strict orders that Jane was not to let the little Boy out of her sight, for fear of any accident happening to him; and, as she was rather a particular lady, the maid generally took pains to obey her orders. But it was not always easy to do so; and, in fact, little boys with hoops run so fast, that no nursery-maid with ordinary self-respect, or a proper consciousness of her own position and dignity, can possibly keep up with them. And so it happened

that, upon one occasion, Charlie ran quite out of Jane's sight, and still his hoop kept up, and on and on he ran. At last he came to where the gravel-walk ended in a green path, and the ground sloped rapidly downwards. On rushed the hoop as if it thought it was in for a good thing and had better make the most of it, and on rushed Charlie, first because he wanted to keep up his hoop as long as he could, and secondly because he couldn't help it. For when boys or girls try to run down a hill, their legs very soon begin to feel as if they didn't belong to their bodies, and go on and on in the most independent manner, until very often the bodies won't stand it any longer, and come toppling over on the heads, as if that was the only way of stopping their impertinent limbs from running quite away with them. This did not happen to Charlie, but he certainly went on a great deal faster and further than he had intended.

At the bottom of the hill there was a short length of flat green path, on each side of which were a number of gorse bushes scattered about, and the path ended at a strong iron-rail fence, beyond which was a large meadow, full of daisies and buttercups, which seemed the very place for cows to enjoy themselves to their hearts' content. The hoop bounded down to the bottom of the hill, with Charlie close behind it, and then it rushed on till it came against the rail fence, and then it gave a spring back and fell down upon the green path, and lay as still and quiet as hoops generally do if they are only left alone. On rushed Charlie after it, and was only a couple of yards from where it lay, when he found something coming across his face and eyes just

like a cobweb. Apparently, too, it *was* a cobweb, or some delicate thing of the kind, which hung from gorse-bush to gorse-bush, all across the path, sparkling with the early dew, and touching the Boy's face with a cool and pleasant touch as he ran through it. But he did not run far through it; he put up his hands to brush it away, and thought he would have no trouble in doing so, but the case was quite different. Delicate as the web seemed, it turned out to be in reality a network of some strength, and, to his great surprise, he was quite checked by it.

But far greater was his surprise, when from the bushes on each side there ran suddenly out a number of little Beings, who surrounded him in a moment with cries of pleasure and triumph. "A mortal, a mortal!" they cried with one voice. "We've got him, we've got him! a real prize! draw the nets tighter and tighter!"

And before Charlie knew what was about to happen to him, the dewy nets were woven round and round his arms and legs, and body and head, and down he was pulled upon the ground in less than no time. He had only time, in fact, to see that his captors were elegant, graceful little creatures, fairy-like in form and general appearance, and dressed in light and fanciful costume—only time, I say, had Charlie to see as much as this, before his head swam, and his eyes grew heavy, and he seemed to fall into a deep sleep, and to forget everything that had happened. I do not know how long he slept, and in fact I do not think that it signifies very much; what I have to do is to tell you the wonderful things which happened afterwards.

When Charlie next became conscious of anything he was lying under an oak-tree, which grew, as oak-trees

sometimes *do* grow, in a large green field or park. It was not the only oak-tree there—oh no! not by a good many—and there was nothing particular about it to distinguish it from other trees. It had a trunk, and branches, and leaves, and even oak-apples, for anything I know, and it seemed very much like other oak-trees except in one respect. This difference consisted in its having a regular face, half-way up its stem, hair, eyes, nose, mouth, and beard; and as Charlie opened his eyes and looked up at it, an immense yawn, which the mouth was just giving, disclosed a set of teeth far beyond the average in size and whiteness. The face wore a kind and friendly look, and seemed almost to smile upon the Boy as he gazed up at it with some little fear and a great deal of astonishment.

"I never!" exclaimed Charlie, after he had stared steadily for a few moments. "Well! I never did!"

"Didn't you really," politely replied the face; "I am very glad to hear it, if it pleases you, but what is it that you never did?"

Charlie was still more astonished when he heard the voice, the tones of which were not disagreeable, though somewhat husky. After a moment's pause, however, he rejoined, "Why, I never saw a tree with a face, and a mouth that could speak."

"Roots and leaves!" cried the tree, creaking as he spoke in evident displeasure; "what do you mean by that? Why shouldn't trees speak as well as other people? I'm barked if I like such observations;" and the face frowned.

"I didn't mean any harm," said Charlie, "and I'm sure I'm very glad you *can* speak, Mr. Oak, for perhaps you'll be able to tell me now where I am

and what has happened, and you look so kind and pleasant that I'm sure you will if you can."

At these words the tree-face smiled, for trees, like human beings, like to be well spoken of, and are not insensible to civility and kindness.

"Well, my Boy," said he, "you're in very good quarters, be it where it may, and nothing has happened to you to which you need at all object. I don't know how much or how little I ought to tell you, but the fact is that you are at this moment in——"

At this instant, just as the oak-tree was going to tell Charlie that which he so much wanted to know, a hand was clapped quickly on his mouth, so that he couldn't utter another syllable, and a different voice exclaimed, rather angrily, "Little oaks should be seen, and not heard," upon which the oak was immediately silent and spoke no more.

Charlie looked up in great surprise at this interruption, but his surprise was increased when he perceived that the speaker was a little Being about a foot and a half in height, and dressed in green from top to toe. A slight figure he was, very well formed, and graceful in his movements, and with a cheerful expression of countenance. He held a small silver-headed cane in his hand, had a green "wide-awake" on his head, set rather on one side in a dandified manner, with the breast feather of a cock robin stuck jauntily in it for ornament. It was a tiny little hand which he had laid on the oak's mouth, and as he withdrew it, and turned round towards Charlie, the Boy saw that he wore a sparkling diamond ring of great beauty and brilliancy. As he looked good-natured, and had a smile on his face, Charlie felt

encouraged to ask him for information upon certain points which were at that moment of considerable interest to him—namely, where he was, and how he had come there. But the little Being did not want to be spoken to, but as soon as he saw Charlie's eyes staring at him with unmistakeable wonder, he burst out laughing—a musical, silvery laugh it was, pleasant enough to hear, and Charlie was not the least bit afraid when he saw how cheerful the stranger seemed to be. Even less did he fear (if it is possible to be less afraid than the least bit) when the little man spoke up in a gay tone, and said, "Well, mortal child, you have had a good sleep, and now don't you want some breakfast?" and, without another word, he suddenly produced a bag of nuts and put them into Charlie's hand.

The Boy felt too hungry to doubt as to what he should do, so he at once put one of the nuts into his mouth. Oh, you can't think how delicious it was! Just fancy the good taste of sugar-candy, mince-pie, plum-pudding, and strawberries and cream all rolled into one, and then you may have some idea of the taste of these nuts. Charlie ate at least a dozen of them right off without stopping, and felt better and stronger at every nut. Then he sat upright, and was again going to question his new friend, when the latter exclaimed in the same cheery voice, "Now come and see the races!"

Charlie instantly got up, and walked quietly after the little gentleman, wondering what would happen next. Right through a yellow carpet of buttercups and daisies they walked, along a little track, and Charlie couldn't imagine where he was or where he

The Mouse Race.

was going to. At last, all of a sudden, they came to a hollow place, on the flat of which was quite a smooth piece of turf, levelled with great care, and evidently laid out for a race-course. Posts marked the course out, and the posts were made of a white stuff, which Charlie could not at first make out, but which he afterwards discovered to be petrified blanc-mange. Then there was a grand stand composed entirely of sponge cake, whilst several private stands of burnt-almonds also ornamented the course, and the judge's stand was made entirely of sugar-candy.

But where were the horses and riders? Charlie had not long to wait. Several mice came cantering along, upon the back of each of which sat a very small frog; each frog had a cap of a different colour upon his head, and wore a proper jockey's dress, and it was beautiful to see how gracefully the mice-horses bore their riders. After they had cantered up and down opposite the grand stand, the jockeys ranged their steeds in line, and everybody seemed full of excitement. Perhaps you will ask who "everybody" was, and well you may, since I have not told you of anybody as yet excepting Charlie and the green Elf. Well, there were a quantity of other little green Elves—not so tall by a couple of inches or more as the first one, but all elegantly made, as far as Charlie could see, all with their green clothes well-fitting and nicely put on, and all apparently full of fun and as happy as possible. They were so anxious about the race that they didn't take much notice of Charlie, and he for his part thought more about the little mice-horses and their curious riders than anything else. And then he heard the little people talking about the start, and he

found that the signal for the start was to be given by two Elves pulling at a regular Christmas cracker: when it went off with a "pop," the horses were to go off too. But the first cracker was damp and wouldn't go off at all, and there was something wrong about the second, for the end of it came out without its going off, and the Elf at the end fell backwards head over heels with the force of his own pulling, at which all his companions laughed heartily. However, the third cracker went off all right, and away dashed the little mice, whilst the Elves clapped their hands, and shouted out the name of their favourite mouse. "Now, Crumb-lover!" "Here comes Dainty-bit!" and at last a loud cry arose, "Nibble-cheese wins! Nibble-cheese wins!" and a mouse came racing past the winning-post with a little green frog with a white cap and a black sash, closely pressed by a cherry and black frog on another mouse, whom he belaboured with a dry dandelion stalk, but who was fairly beaten by "Nibble-cheese."

Next came a hurdle-race of grasshoppers, which was the funniest and most ridiculous thing that Charlie had ever seen. The hurdles were made of dried daisy-stalks, and it was the greatest sport to see the grasshoppers jump. "Green-back" was the name of the winner, and he was as proud of his victory as any boy who ever won a race. Then came a wrestling match between two hedgehogs, which made Charlie roar with laughter. Over and over they rolled on the ground, the object of each being to push the other over a boundary-line which had been drawn in the grass. At last one of them got the better of the other, and all the lookers-on clapped their hands in

approval. Charlie began to clap his hands too, but his friend the Elf told him not to do so, or he would frighten the animals, upon which he left off.

Various other amusements followed, the like of which mortal children have seldom or ever witnessed. A hornpipe was danced by young rabbits, whose grave faces, whilst they twisted and twirled their legs about in the dance, convulsed Charlie with laughter; a sack-race, in which moles were the performers, next followed, and this seemed to please everybody very much, except the moles themselves, who appeared as if they had rather have been left quietly in their holes.

At last the games seemed to be over as far as the animals were concerned, and Charlie began to wonder what would happen next, when one of the Elves suddenly exclaimed, "Let's have a mushroom match!" and in a moment the little people began to pelt each other with mushrooms, shrieking with laughter all the time, in which Charlie heartily joined.

Presently one of them cried out—"Stop, stop, that's not fair! somebody has thrown a fungus;" and then they began to talk very fast and abuse the Elf that had committed such a crime, as a punishment for which he was obliged to eat a slice of the fungus he had thrown, at which he made all kinds of queer faces, and seemed greatly to dislike it.

When the excitement to which this little occurrence gave rise was over, Charlie thought it was high time to inquire where he was, and what was to become of him. Accordingly, he accosted the Elf who had brought him to the races, and asked him the question which was uppermost in his head. "If you please, Sir, where am I, and mayn't I go home soon?"

To his surprise the Elf appeared either entirely to misunderstand his question, or at all events to be determined to take no notice of it, for the only answer which he returned appeared to have nothing whatever to do with the question.

"Reels and jigs!" he cried. "I quite agree with you, little mortal. There is nothing like dancing, and this is the very place for it!" So saying, he seized hold of the hand of the Elf nearest to him, and his example was immediately followed by all his companions, who, joining hands and forming several circles, began to dance round and round in the maddest manner, trampling down grass, daisies, and buttercups, and making those curious Fairy rings at which we have so often looked in the green meadows, and wondered how and why they came there.

This amusement continued for some little time, during which Charlie stood and watched the dancing Elves until his head grew quite giddy with their continually going round and round. All of a sudden they stopped, and the chief Elf exclaimed in his clear, pleasant voice, "It's getting late for this fun now; come to the grove and sing." Upon which off he set, the other Elves following, and Charlie, finding that he had nothing better to do, went with the rest.

Presently they came to a group of large trees, five or six in number, growing in the meadow, and affording a pleasant shelter from the sun to the sheep or cattle which might be pastured there. Underneath the trees was a regular carpet of Blue-bells, and a number of Lords and Ladies growing amongst them. When the Elf had arrived at this place, he gave a signal to his followers, who ranged themselves on either side of

him, and after a little of the coughing and clearing of throats in which all singers think it necessary to indulge before beginning their songs, they struck up a melody which Charlie thought was the very sweetest music which he had ever heard in the whole course of his life; and thus ran the song of the Elves:—

"In the waning summer light,
Which the hearts of mortals love,
'Tis the hour for elfin sprite
Through the flow'ry mead to rove.

"Mortal eyes the spot may scan,
Yet our forms they ne'er descry;
Though so near the haunts of man,
Merrily our trade we ply.

"Ever 'mid the fragrant flowers,
With the songster birds and bees,
Practise we our magic powers,
Loving playmates such as these.

"Shrink we from the crowded town
And the din of noisy street,
Where would harsher voices drown
Elfin music pure and sweet.

"Shrink we from the busy throng
And the scenes of mortal life,
Where, enthralled by passions strong,
Men engage in endless strife.

"Endless strife for gold or fame,
(Empty bubbles to content!)
Let them strive: but all the same
Elfin life is different.

"Elfin life in mead and glen,
Ever joyous, ever free;
Better than the life of men
In its quiet purity.

"Heav'n on Elves has kindly smiled,
Smiled on Elves and elfin art;
Let us to this mortal child
Of our bliss a share impart."

And as Charlie listened to these words, a soft, soothing feeling seemed to steal gently over him, and he felt just as if he was asleep and yet awake—asleep enough to be resting and enjoying his rest, and awake enough to understand perfectly well all that was going on.

Very strange things they were which went on, I can tell you. When the little Elves had done singing, they sat down under the trees, and some of them drew forth certain musical instruments, which Charlie could never exactly describe, but from which proceeded the most exquisitely delicious music that ever delighted mortal ears. And as the Elves played, curious results followed. All the Lords and Ladies came out of their green cloaks, ranged themselves opposite to each other, bowed, asked each other to dance, just as if they were real people at a ball, and *did* dance, as gracefully as you could have wished to see them. They waltzed, they galoped, they went through the "Lancers" without a mistake, and had besides several dances of their own, which Charlie had never seen or heard of before, but which he thought remarkably pretty.

When they had all danced for some time, the music began to be played slower and slower; and as it nearly came to a stop, the little Lords and Ladies all went back into their homes, and nestled up warmly in their green cloaks as comfortably as possible. Then the Elves began to play at riddles, and asked each other the funniest questions in the

world, only the answers were still funnier, and Charlie could not make head or tail of them.

"Why does the sun shine?" asked one Elf of another.

"Because there's no lamp big enough to light the world without him," was the answer.

"How many stars are there?" shouted one.

"Twice as many as half," said another.

"What flower does the calf like best?"

"The cow's-lips."

"Why is our grove like a king's court?"

"Because there are lots of Lords and Ladies in it."

"Which is the stupidest tree?"

"The sloe-tree."

All these questions and answers passed merrily round the elfin circle, till at last one Elf turned round and said quite sharply to Charlie, "Why is a green linnet like a rhinoceros?"

"It isn't a bit like," said Charlie.

"No more it is!" cried the Elf; "but how in the world did you find that out, mortal child?" and they all burst into screams of laughter, and rolled about under the trees as merry a party as you could wish to see.

At last, when they were quite tired of laughing, the chief Elf cried out suddenly, "Now let us tell some stories!" Upon which another Elf began directly:—

"Once there was a grasshopper so big that he knocked down the sheep and cows when he ran against them." And a second Elf chimed in as fast as possible—"Once there was a man so tall that he could wade through the deepest sea without the water coming up to his waistcoat!"

"Oh, you stupid creatures!" said the chief Elf, "I didn't mean those kind of stories, but real, good, amusing little tales, such as mortal fathers tell when they take their little girls one on each knee, and draw their chairs up near the fire, and the boys sit on the rug at their feet and listen. Now then, Flit-by-night, tell us one of your best at once!"

Flit-by-night was a delicately formed little Elf, with a pleasant face, and a merry twinkle in his eye withal; and when he was thus called upon by his chief, he turned head over heels directly to show his respect for him, and then crossed his legs, folded his arms, and thus began his story:—

"Once there was a Boy who didn't believe in Fairies. He had read the wise writings of some *very* grave and clever people who had written reviews upon Fairy-tale books and had said they were all nonsense, and that the age of Fairies and Ogres was past and gone. The Boy believed these wise writers, and in his childhood there was no romance, no pleasant fancies flitted through his young brain, but everything was plain and plodding and matter-of-fact, and he was quite a man-boy, with none of the sparkling nonsense life of merry childhood about him. The dear Fairies saw and pitied him, but they could do nothing with him. If they came in the night and teased him with a dream, from which he woke up with a frightened start, he only muttered to himself that he had eaten too much plum-pudding the evening before, and must not do so again; if they slyly put a drop of magic ache-powder in his ear, and gave him the ear-ache, he always remembered he had sat in some draught or

other lately, and laid it all to *that;* and even the pretty little Fairy rings in the green meadows he explained in some knowing way, as proceeding from some natural cause, and having nothing in the world to do with the Fairy race. This, as you may imagine, was very provoking to the merry Fairies; for, like mortal people, they like to be thought something of, and don't at all approve of being neglected and scorned. So they determined to teach this Boy to *be* a Boy if they could, and not to be such a grave old philosopher before he was even in trousers. Philosophers, you know, are terrible people to deal with in society; and if the world were governed by them, it would soon be a place hardly fit to live in, for Elves or mortals either. But philosophers not in trousers are things not to be endured, and the sooner they give up the trade the better.

"So the Fairies set their wits to work to show this Boy that there were Fairies, and they played him every trick you can imagine. For some time it was of no use: if they suddenly pinched his feet, he declared it was corns; if they whispered to him as he walked in the woods, he said it was the wind blowing through the leaves of the trees; and when they tore in half in the night the pincushion in his room, he told everybody that it was a mouse, and set a trap next evening. Unfortunately, too, the trap happened to catch a mouse, which confirmed him all the more in his disbelief. So the Fairies were quite in despair of teaching him by common means the lesson they had intended, and they determined to try something rather more unusual.

"One evening the Boy had sauntered out just after

tea, and was walking towards the gravel-walk at the end of the lawn, when a very small figure, clad entirely in green, walked quietly before him from one bush into another. The Boy stopped short: another figure followed, another and another. The Boy thought to himself very gravely for a minute, and then said out aloud, 'Oh! I see: toads—green toads.' At that moment something struck him a sharp blow on the forehead; it was like the blow of a pea from a peashooter, and, as he looked up and down in astonishment, he felt several more of the same blows.

"'Hallo!' he cried out, 'how suddenly it has come on to hail!' and at that moment he cast his eyes down, and as the blows continued he perceived that they came not from hail or from peas, but from large, round, white sugar-plums.

"This surprised him very much, and he stepped on for a yard or two, still thinking the matter might be explained somehow in a natural way, when all of a sudden out jumped the little green figures, and began to pelt him so furiously that he hardly knew whether to stand still or run away. A chocolate drop hit him full on the nose; he closed his eye just in time to save it from being nearly put out by a burnt almond, and a large bit of 'toffy' went bang into his mouth. Then, and then only, did he perceive that he was actually standing within the circle of a Fairy ring, and it flashed across his mind like lightning that these were Fairies, and that the stories he had always disbelieved were true after all. He stood still, dumb with amazement; and whilst his face was still tingling with the blows of the sugar-plums and other sweet

bullets, a low, clear voice sang to him—though he could not distinguish the singer—

"'Boy that doubts the Fairy race,
Tempt no more their magic spleen;
Never more avert thy face
From the mystic Fairy Green.

"'Fairy legends list and learn,
Fairy fantasies enjoy,
Unbelieving science spurn,
Be—while still you can—a boy.'

"And as he listened his heart grew lighter, and his spirit bounded within him with a pleasure which he had never felt before. He threw up his arms in the air, and cried out aloud, 'Then there really *are* Fairies! Oh dear, kind little Fairies! how happy I am to make friends with you, and to know that you *do* exist!' And in a moment the Boy seemed to feel a new being altogether, and all his old dull, heavy matter-of-fact ways were charmed out of him by the Fairy magic. He stood still in the Fairy ring, and the merry little creatures around him smiled sweet smiles upon him, and kissed their hands to him as they slowly and gracefully glided back into the bushes and faded away from his sight and hearing.

"But the memory of that evening never, never faded from the Boy's heart. He was a changed Boy from that hour. True, he did not forget to work when there was work to be done, but at other times he was ever merry and light-hearted, and it seemed as if some of the loving cheerfulness of the little Elves had settled in his heart, never to be rooted out again in his journey through the world. It held by him after he grew up to be a man; people used to say that he some-

times talked a great deal of nonsense and was always ready for a laugh and a joke; but if they had known the truth, they would have said that it was the pleasant spirit of the Fairies still resting upon him, and lighting up his life with a glow unknown to mortals of a duller and heavier disposition."

Here Flit-by-night stopped, and all the Elves clapped their hands in approbation of his story, to which Charlie had listened with deep attention. Then the chief Elf turned round to another of his friends and said, "Tickling Tim, now it is your turn."

Tickling Tim was an Elf with a long face and a quaint expression of dry fun upon his countenance; he made but little pause or hesitation when he was accosted, but sat bolt upright in his place and began at once in a very grave voice.

"Once there was a cabbage bigger than all the cabbages about him. He was a very proud vegetable, and turned up his leaves at all the other cabbages, despising cauliflowers and broccoli, sneering at green peas and French beans, and ranking parsnips and onions as the lowest of the low. In fact he claimed to be King of the cabbages, and no one dared to contradict him. At last one day a respectable asparagus, whom he had grossly insulted by allusions to his leafless condition, telling him that he must be little better than a pauper to walk about without a great coat, demanded the reason of his fancying himself so much better than all the other fellows in the garden.

"Curling up his outside leaf in a contemptuous manner, the cabbage replied, 'It is only through my kindness, contemptible weed, that I condescend to reply to you; but the fact is, that besides the claim to

superiority which my size and general appearance give me, I can show you at once that I possess a title to dignity which is shared by no other vegetable around me.' And, opening his leaves, the haughty cabbage displayed a large snail comfortably located in his very heart, and directed the attention of the asparagus to this, which he termed a Royal visitor.

"The asparagus wagged his head with a knowing look. 'Humph,' said he, 'to show me this may be a proof of your kindness, but in my opinion it does not say much for your goodness of heart, and I think you will live to rue the hour when you admitted such a visitor.'

"With these words he went quietly back to his bed, and left his proud neighbour to himself. The cabbage continued to puff and swell with pride, and to hold his head very high. No one was good enough to speak to him, and in fact honest vegetables of proper feeling soon ceased to wish for his society. He found, however, that in the midst of his glory, he was afflicted with occasional pains and strange twinges, which were anything but comfortable. For some time he could not understand the cause, until at last it suddenly flashed across him that these new feelings might proceed from his noble and precious visitor. However, he folded his leaves the more closely around him, and bore everything cheerfully for the sake of presenting a good appearance to the world.

"So things went on, and days rolled by, until one fine morning the gardener entered the cabbage row, knife in hand, and began to inspect the vegetables. He came up to the proud cabbage, and, after looking at him for a moment or two, remarked, 'Here's a

good big one, but I doubt he's all right.' And then, stooping down, he opened the leaves and looked carefully into the heart.

"'Ah,' said he, 'it is just as I thought; them nasty snails has eat the heart right out—the cabbage ain't fit for the pigs!' These words, pronounced in a tone easily audible by every vegetable in the neighbourhood, filled the proud cabbage with feelings of the deepest humiliation and dismay. What, then, had his cherished visitor wrought him this evil? Had he, whom he had entertained as a friend, and of whose visit he had been so proud, all the time occupied himself in eating into his vitals, and destroying his very existence? How would he be disgraced and lowered in the eyes of all his neighbours! Never more could he hold up his head among cabbages! His reputation was lost for ever! Small time for meditation, however, had the miserable wretch, for, seizing him in one hand, the gardener, with his knife in the other, cut out the heart of the unfortunate cabbage, threw it on the ground, and only afforded him a melancholy satisfaction by making an end of the snail by setting the heel of his boot upon it with a force sufficient to have smashed twenty of such creatures into fragments; he then calmly cut off the rest of the cabbage, which he presently flung into the pig-sty, leaving a miserable barren stalk as the only relic of the haughty but ill-fated vegetable. Thus, brother Elves, we may learn from the fate of this cabbage that to cherish pride in our hearts is to entertain therein a dangerous guest, who may prove a very snail to our happiness, and eventually destroy us from off the face of the earth!"

Tickling Tim had scarcely finished his tale, which he

did in the same grave manner as that with which he had begun it, than several elfin voices shouted loudly, "Oh, what a serious story! don't let's have any more of them!" and they all jumped up as if eager for a new amusement. At last one called out, "Come and chaff the nightingales!" and off they set at once to the edge of the shrubbery, where the nightingales were singing as sweetly as usual. They stopped to listen, and presently a nightingale began to sing close to them, and thus ran the song :—

"How pleasant it is in the sweet moon-light
To warble low notes to the beautiful moon;
With melody sweet to enliven the night,
And make mortals regret the sun rises so soon!"

Scarcely had the nightingale sang these notes, which Charlie somehow or other perfectly understood, than one of the Elves, imitating the bird in the most wonderful manner, sang as follows :—

"How stupid it is in the chill, damp night
To warble dull ditties both foolish and old;
To open their windows weak mortals t' invite,
Whence they probably catch a detestable cold."

The nightingale stopped its song for a moment when it heard this rival songster, but, as if careless of the interruption, or not having properly understood it, he presently began again :—

"On the branches I hop, which are near to the ground,
Where my mate guards her eggs in the snug little nest,
And I make the whole grove with my warbling resound,
My song is the music which mortals love best."

To which the Elf immediately rejoined—

"The cat will catch birds which hop near to the ground,
And a foot stamp on mate, eggs, and snug little nest;
The noise which you make restless sleepers confound,
And both you and your din most devoutly detest."

At this the nightingale grew very angry, stopped singing, and began to make a little chattering noise, like one stone being struck upon another, which nightingales always do when they are interrupted or suspect an enemy near. This was just what the Elves wanted, and they all went into fits of laughter.

Suddenly one of them cried out, "Oh, here comes the old white owl! Let's have some fun with her!" and one of them ran up to some dead roses which were lying on the ground underneath a rose-tree, and touched two or three of them, which immediately took the form of mice, and began to run along the ground. Down pounced the old owl, and found to her surprise that she had only caught a dead rose in her claws, so she mounted in the air again, vexed and surprised, muttering that she must be getting terribly old and blind to have made such a stupid mistake. She never for a moment suspected the Elves, who were delighted at the trick, and seemed in such a mischievous humour that Charlie thought he should hardly be surprised at anything which they did now.

However, after they had laughed enough, one or two of the little creatures began to yawn, for all the world like a child whose bedtime is near, but whose nursery-maid doesn't come, and when Charlie saw this he somehow or other began to yawn too; and as he opened his mouth very wide for a regular good yawn, the little Elves seemed to fade gradually away from before his eyes, their voices became more and more indistinct, their laughter was no longer to be heard, and a strange feeling stole over the little Boy's senses, as if he hardly knew whether what had happened had *really* happened, or whether he had only been listening to an amusing story.

And as he yawned again and opened his eyes wide, there he was in his own little cot, and his own dear Mamma was bending over him with a sweet loving smile—such a smile as touches a chord of tenderness in one's heart ever after through life when one calls it to mind.

"Charlie, my darling," she said, "you have had a nice long sleep, and now my little Boy may get up and have a run in the garden with Jane before dinner."

Charlie couldn't understand it. Surely he *had* been out in the garden with Jane, for there it was he had met with the Elves and had such strange adventures. He didn't know what to make of it, and looked up at his Mamma with a curiously puzzled expression of countenance. "Where are the Elves gone to?" he asked; and his Mamma smiled again as she replied,—

"I don't know, my Boy, unless they have flown back to dream-land. My darling has been dreaming!"

So Charlie said no more, for he knew very well that when grown-up people take such fancies into their head, it is of no use trying to persuade them to the contrary. But for all that he was certain that he had been into the elfin country and seen all the strange things of which I have told you; and no doubt the Elves had managed by their magic that his Mamma should think that he had been all the time safely in bed at home.

II.

FITZY'S STORY.

THERE are too many dogs about this place. A great deal too many, I should say, but then I am nobody now, and my opinion is worth nothing. It wasn't so always. When I first came here, I was petted and made much of by everybody. "Such a dear!" "Such a pet!" "Such a pretty little dog!" I was called, and I daresay people were right. I was—and am—a Skye terrier, low-built, with short legs and beautiful long hair, and disposed to be fond of everyone. Times are rather changed now. I hear them say I am cross, and selfish, and jealous, because I give a growl and a snap at these new favourites that run about all over the place as if it was their own.

I don't believe that I'm a bit worse than other people, and I'm quite sure I am more true and faithful than most men and women, though other dogs may certainly be as much so as I am. But to tell the honest truth, I am not so fond as some people are of new faces and new friends. Give me an old friend and a voice I know and a face I have loved; you won't find me change to *them* unless they change to me; and

even then I let them have their own way without remonstrance, although it often costs me a bitter thought and a salt tear when I am curled up by the fagot-stack or in the wood-lodge or the stable, and quietly meditating upon the world and its ways.

Pshaw! what a world it is! A great many dogs and people have said that before me, no doubt, and I dare-say a great many more will say it, for it is true, and easy enough to be found out by anyone who has lived at all in the world. Why, I have told you what was thought of *me* when I first came to Smeeth. I never did anything to deserve different thoughts or different treatment, but just look how it is now. Everybody has a favourite dog, and my share of bones would come to absolutely nothing if I hadn't got friends among the servants, and if I didn't keep a pretty sharp look-out for myself. Talk of dogs, indeed! Why, the place is full of them! There is old Sailor in his kennel in the kitchen-yard; a good-natured old fellow he is, and as fond of sporting as I am. He has the best of it, too, for when they take him out on shooting days, and he goes bounding off in the maddest state of joyous excitement, *I* am always driven back and told to stay at home. There's justice for you! *I* don't call it justice. "Go back, Fitzy!" and I have to slink off with my tail between my legs, whilst that great hulking brute of a retriever goes off as merrily as need be.

Then there is that little milksop, Fifine—the white toy-dog or toy-fool as I call him—just like a little make-believe dog that people buy out of a shop-window for a child. Yet *our* children are as fond of him as if he was really of any use. Weak, little puny wretch! He

belongs to our Kate, and I have seen her kiss and fondle him till it made me quite savage. He lives indoors too! Constantly I have seen him through the glass doors of the dining-room or drawing-room, curled up on the soft carpet, or playing with the children, whilst I was out in the wet and cold. And I know he has had made for him a jolly little basket house of his own, where he can cosy up and lie as snug and comfortable as possible. That dog is regularly spoilt! *He* could never face the wet and cold long. I should like to see him rolled in the snow, and dragged through a dirty puddle—conceited little beast! What fun it would be! Then Miss Eva has her pet too—the wee black and tan terrier Tippoo. She seems immensely fond of the little chap, though I can't see what there is to like in him, myself. He is always running round one and barking, and racing about with the other dogs, as often as not through one of the flower-beds, and is altogether too lively a customer for my money—there is nothing grave, sober, or sedate about him. Then our two boys, Ned and Cecil, have got their pets too—Whisky and Bessy. Whisky is a long-haired little beast, a bad imitation of myself. I think they call him a "Dandy Dinmont;" and he certainly makes din enough sometimes, though to my mind there is very little of the "Dandy" about him. Bessy is a black and white creature—no great harm about her that I know, only she is a regular fool about pain, and never squeaks or howls if they hold her up by one ear or by the tail: that they call being well-bred, I believe, but in my opinion it is the mark of a fool. But I really think the last animal is the greatest nuisance of all.

One would have thought our people had dogs

enough in all conscience, but they have lately got a great Scotch brute, black, with white breast and long head, which they call a Collie dog. Jock is his name, and he pretends to be immensely fond of the children. He races and jumps about them when they go out for a walk, and sometimes throws one of them down in his gambols, for he is a rough playfellow, is master Jock. When the children go to play in the large empty drawing-room, he runs round to the glass door, and sits there howling and barking because he cannot get in to play with them. At night he has a mat put for him in the croquet cupboard in the verandah, but he doesn't sleep there always; and I have heard it whispered that he is even suspected of having once or twice stolen off at night to have some fun with the sheep. But I cannot answer for this, and no honest dog would take away another's character upon mere suspicion, so I only mention it as a rumour, which is probably unfounded. Jock is especially the pet of the Lady of the house, in whose favour he has entirely cut me out, though she sometimes gives me a passing pat and says, "Dear old Fitzy, does he feel neglected? faithful old fellow." Of course I feel neglected, Ma'am, and of course I am faithful, as all my family were before me, but I feel the present state of things bitterly nevertheless. I *will* say that the Master never passes me without a friendly pat and a kind word, but then he is a great deal away, and I should come badly off after all if it wasn't for dear old Butcher. That's the man for *my* money. Butcher keeps everything going about the place, with what little help I can give him. He milks the cows, takes care of the fowls and ducks, chops the wood, buys butter when it is wanted, and

chickens when there are none at home. In short, there is nothing handy and useful that Butcher does not do. A rare friend he has been to me, and I love him better than any other being in the world.

Revel isn't a bad fellow; he goes with the cart, and does all kind of errands, and the head-gardener, Kimpton, is kind enough. In fact, I don't complain of any of the gardeners and outdoor people, and Mrs. Huxstep the dairywoman, is friendly enough also, but Butcher is my *particular* friend; and often and often, after following him about all day, I go home with him to his cheery cottage and pass a pleasant evening.

But I haven't told you all about our house yet. It is called the "Paddock," and I have often heard people say that its great fault consists in its being so near the high road. I don't see that it is a fault myself. It is cheerful to hear and see the things pass, and then, though there is a high fence of fir boards between the shrubbery and the road for some distance, there is a space of twenty yards or more where there is nothing but a quickset hedge and a row of firs and laurels, so that one can creep quietly through and have a cheery bark at any passer-by whose appearance strikes one as objectionable, and then, although beggars are sometimes troublesome, Sailor's deep bay gives notice of their coming, and there are always people about.

Our kitchen-yard is a very pleasant place. If I could draw, I would make you a pretty picture of it, but I never learned when I was young, and now it is too late. But it is a snug place, paved with stones: and as you enter it from the private road which runs round from the stable, parallel with the high road and skirting the wall of the kitchen-garden, you have on

your right hand, standing back right into the said road (which continues round to the front door), the pretty dairy, which looks like a chapel till you get inside it. On your left, the kitchen garden-wall comes round, and against it is Sailor's kennel, close up to the large wood-lodge, which extends down nearly to the house, only at the end of it is the room which was built for a turning-room (though nobody has ever turned there yet), and between it and the house is the door from the yard into the kitchen-garden. Further on your right you have the larders, and then comes the kitchen, forming the right-hand side of the yard, whilst opposite you is the servants' hall, and the nursery-wing of the house behind.

The kitchen is a very pretty building, and the ivy has grown up against the wall till it reaches up on to the roof. And don't I know the door that opens into the scullery adjoining the kitchen! Many a time have I waited there for a bone, and many a savoury morsel have I got from the cook or kitchen-maid, or from kind Mrs. Huxstep who does the cooking for any of the family who come down for a day or two when the regular staff of house-servants are in town. Such a time the family *do* stay in town. From the end of January till August they are often away, and if it wasn't for Butcher the place would be as dull as ditch-water. One blessing, however, is that the other dogs are taken off. Fifine, spoilt child that he is, goes to London too. Oh yes! he is much too valuable to be left behind, I suppose, and wherever Kate goes, he follows her fortunes. Tippoo is draughted off to the steward's house, where there are some young children who make much of him. I wish, for my part, they

would keep him altogether, for it wouldn't break my heart if I never saw him again. That lout Jock is taken off to Cloke, the Park-wood keeper, who I trust keeps him in good order. Bessy goes to the West Brabourne keeper, Measday, and Whisky is shut up somewhere or other too. So there is only old Sailor left in his kennel, and I have the whole place pretty much to myself.

To be sure there are the two ponies, Kitty and Campy. Kitty was Ned's pony; but I have heard the people say that he would have a new one, and then it will be Kate's, who generally rides it now when Ned is away, or when the cricket season has arrived, for the young gentleman prefers cricket to riding. Campy is Eva's—it is short for "Camp-stool." When Ned was quite a little boy this pony was bought for him; and when they were deciding upon its name, I heard him say, "I think I should call it Camp-stool, because it's so easy to sit upon," and then and there they named the pony accordingly.

There is a legend that this creature is thirty years old and never grows any older, but I don't believe it.

And besides these ponies (which generally stay here till Easter, and then one or both go up for the children to ride in London) there is the horse that does the cart work, and a cat (who seems to me to be a perfect nuisance, and has innumerable kittens continually), and lots of chickens and ducks. I get on very well with all the live animals—bar those stupid other dogs—and I don't much complain of my life. Bones, however, are not so plentiful as I could wish on some occasions. There are enough and to spare for all of us when the family is at home; the Master or the

children feed some of the dogs from the dining-room luncheon, and the servants are very generous to all of us. But oh! how different when the family move off to London! The servants hardly ever seem to have a bone, and when they do, it never comes to me until they have scraped every morsel of meat off it. I heard some one say one day that this was because they were left on "board wages." I don't know what that has to do with it, for a good servant would be as careful with meat which his master had bought for the household as he would be with meat which he had bought out of his own board wages; but still there is the fact, and I often come short of a meal at this trying season of the year.

But my life is a happy one, too, for I have many amusements. I have always been fond of a quiet hunt by myself, or with a friend. I suppose it is rather wrong of me, but then nobody ever takes *me* out hunting, and so I am forced to look out for myself, or else to go without my sport, which is not to be thought of for a moment. What fun I have had in those pleasant hunts! Ah me! I am old now, and fonder of lying in a sunny place, wherever I can find one, than of bustling about through brakes and briars after rabbits, but many and many a "lark" have I had in the good old days. The best time to manage it was early in the morning, before any of the family were about, and I wasn't likely to be missed. Often and often have I stolen off at such times, and thoroughly enjoyed myself. Sometimes I would tempt another dog to come with me. There was that jolly little rascal Chip, the black terrier; he was always up to a lark, and he and I have had many a successful ramble together.

A merry little chap he was too, and could run a good pace. I was very sorry when Mr. Kingscote shot him by accident in Coombe wood, and have never quite liked the man since.

But whether in company or alone, I had plenty of fun in those days. Sometimes I would cross the road and creep into the plantation by the Hoath field, where a rabbit was often to be found, only he was sure to be off to the drains in the field before I could get near him. Then I would trot across the fields to Hatch Park, and creep underneath the high wooden fence into Barracks wood. On the bank, underneath the oaks, were numerous rabbit-earths, and the little beggars used to scamper away inside as soon as ever they caught sight of me. I used to creep down the bank, however, and go on to the fern beyond the wood, where the best fun was to be had.

One day I remember I had gone out this way, and was in full chase of a rabbit across a track in the fern, when "bang" went a gun, and several shots struck and stung me sharply. I glanced round, and saw at once that it was James Cornell, the Hatch keeper. Fortunately, he was too far off to hurt me much, but he roared out in a voice which I thought at the time was the loudest I ever heard, "Go home, go home—get along with ye!" a command which I obeyed without losing a moment, and was out of the park before he had done yelling. They are never to be trusted, those gamekeepers; and if they get a chance of shooting one on the sly, think no more of an honest dog's life than of killing a fox or even a paltry cat.

This taught me a lesson, however, and I never came near Mr. Cornell again.

They are all alike, though—a bad lot, to my mind. Why, there was Cloke at Park wood—our own keeper as I may say—there were grave suspicions about a dog which disappeared from Evegate Farm, and that pretty Jeannette Murton lost a favourite cat under curious circumstances. I wonder the man could have had the heart to kill a cat of *hers*, but he isn't a beauty himself, and I suppose beauty had no charms for him. I don't think *I* should have worried *that* cat if I had caught it, but then I never cared to attack any cat if I could help it—they do spit and scratch so, nasty creatures! I like to run round and bark at them, and make a great pretence of longing to be at them if they run up a tree or sit on a wall above my head. That's quite enough for *me*, and I don't admire dogs who rush in for a tumble and worry with every cat they meet.

But I was talking of keepers. The man at Park wood is not so bad after all, in some respects. He took me out of a wire once, in which I had caught my foot—and precious uncomfortable I was, too! As it was, I sprained my leg badly, and was laid up for some days, but it might have been much worse. The keeper abused me a good deal, but never hurt me. I suppose he thought there would be a great fuss made at the House if I was really lost, and so there would have been in those days. It was very bold of me to go down to Park wood at all, and I have seldom ventured to do so since, but I had been visiting a lady friend at the farm, and as she had expressed a strong desire for a young rabbit, thought it would only be polite in me to try, which I accordingly did, with the above result.

But I got into a worse scrape once in the Scott's Hall plantations. I had had a warm hour's work in the willows, where there are open ditch drains overgrown with brambles and rushes, down which the rabbits creep, and it is desperate hard work for a long-haired dog to get after them. So, when I was rather tired, I went into the Fishpond wood below, and presently came upon a dead rabbit lying a little way inside a large hole. I walked up to have a sniff at him, when I set my foot upon a concealed trap, which sprung up and enclosed my poor little leg between its iron teeth with the grip of a vice. Didn't I howl! I never was so frightened and hurt in my life! At first I thought my leg was broken; the pain was dreadful, and I think I should have bit my own master if he had come up just at that moment. Nobody came when I yelled, and I went on yelling in despair for nearly half an hour, I should think, till I began to think I should die then and there. Most fortunately, however, Farmer Thorpe, of Lodge House Farm, was out near the wood that morning; and as he heard my continued howling, he came in to see what was the matter. I think he knew that I belonged to the Paddock: in fact, I am sure he did, for he called me by my name, and although I felt as snappish as a dog would be likely to feel in my position, I had sense enough to wag my tail faintly, and was rewarded by being speedily released from my painful situation. I limped home as well as I could, but I can tell you that I felt the injury for a long time; and it was weeks and weeks before my leg got well; if, indeed, it has ever been quite as strong again as it was before my misfortune.

That neighbourhood was rather unlucky for me, for I was very nearly finished off there upon another occasion. I chased a rabbit into one of the Callan fir-plantations at Scott's Hall, just behind the "Woolpack" Inn, where the soil is very sandy. I was so close to the little creature, which was quite a young one, that I nearly caught him as he darted into rather a large hole; and being vexed at losing him, and moreover excited with the chase, I began to scratch at the hole as fast as I could, hoping that I might still get at him. I set to work with such good will that I made the hole much bigger in a very short time, and in I crept, scratching my way vigorously, and getting deeper and deeper into the earth. At last I began to feel rather tired, and to think that the rabbit must be further off than I had at first judged by the scent. So, believing that it was hopeless to go on, I thought I would give it up as a bad job.

A bad job indeed it was; for when I began to try and go back, I found that this was by no means so easy as I had imagined. I had, I suppose, scratched up a good deal of loose sand with my hind feet, and perhaps some had fallen in from above, but, in whatever way it had come there, sand there was behind me in such quantities, and blocking up the passage in such a manner, that I could scarcely move. First of all I had the very greatest difficulty in turning my body round so as to get my head facing the entrance; and when I had accomplished this, I positively could not move an inch.

Had the rabbits only known their power, they might have crept up behind me and scratched and bitten me as much as they liked without my having the

power to resist. Luckily, however, rabbits never *do* dare to attack dogs under any circumstances, so I was safe from the fear of such a thing. However, I was by no means safe from the fear of being left here to starve, for it seemed to me impossible that I should ever get out. Faint, weary, and desperate, I lay panting for some time in real agony. I shall never forget that time. As I lay expecting certain death, sooner or later, the events of my past life seemed to flit before me with fearful rapidity and distinctness. I remembered how cruelly I had chased the innocent chicks and ducklings, who had never hurt me; how once—ay, more than once—I had frightened a hen partridge off her nest and ruined her hopes of rearing a lovely covey of children; and how I had actually hustled over and lamed one of our own venerable ducks in one of my romping moods. The insults I had heaped on the pigs—useful, if not attractive animals; my teasing barks at the heels of the cows and ponies; the annoyances I had inflicted upon the stable cats; and even my sneers at old Sailor—when well beyond the reach of his chain—all seemed to rise in condemnation against me. How I wished I had been a better and a kinder dog!

I even had my doubts as to the propriety of my barking attacks upon certain beggars, and made many good resolutions of more gentle and charitable conduct for the future if I could but escape the miserable fate which seemed impending. I thought of the friendly kitchen-yard at the Paddock, every object in which I seemed actually to see before me. I thought of the kitchen-door open, and the cook with a plate of bones standing there and inviting my attention. I thought of

the front of the house, the children running on the lawn, Master Ned at his cricket in the meadow, and the other dogs frisking about. I thought of the rhododendrons, and all the beautiful flowers of the smooth, nicely kept, sunk croquet-ground, with its apple-trees on one side and row of young yews on the other, and the standard roses beyond—all, all I saw in that dreadful moment; and then—oh, agony of agonies!—I thought of dear old Butcher! I saw him with his pails going off to milk the cows, and I even fancied I could hear his well-known whistle and call to me —"Fitzy, Fitzy!" The accents rang through my ears, and I gave a sort of involuntary struggle in my anxiety to answer the summons which I had never yet disobeyed. Alas! it was useless. I was too tightly fixed to move, and hope left me.

Then came the cruel, racking thought, "Will anyone remember me? Will not even Butcher, after a day or two of wondering what has become of me, forget poor Fitzy for ever? I shall fade out of the memory of all my friends, and even old Sailor will cease to remember that there ever was such a creature as I. Shall I ever be found? Who can tell? I may be left here for ever, or perhaps, years hence, people will be digging for sand or for the foundations of a summer-house on this hill, to which they may come up on a bright day in the warm time of year and look over Brabourne Leese to Horton Park, and run the eye along to the cheerful chalk hills of friendly Beachborough whilst they sit and smoke their pleasant pipe; and as they dig, they will come upon a few dried-up bones and cast them aside, little knowing that this is all that is left of poor Fitzy!" So I lay and thought, until thought

became madness, and I could think no longer. A hot, choking feeling came up into my throat, my eyes seemed as if they would start out of my head, and my heart beat as if it would burst within my breast. I cannot tell how long I stayed there, or how many weary hours passed over before deliverance came. Never shall I forget it! All of a sudden—close over the rabbit's hole in which I lay—I heard a voice, speaking in well-known accents, pronounce the words, "Where are you?" The words were not addressed to me, but I knew the speaker well. It was my dear old Master, or rather my Mistress's husband, for I was supposed to be the peculiar property of the Lady of the House.

In the warm days of Whitsuntide, when he was down at home for a short holiday, he was in the habit of taking Ned out to look for birds' nests in the shrubberies and plantations, and I believe he enjoyed the sport every bit as much as the boy. I don't think they ever took the eggs, or at least only one when there were three, and two if there were four or five in the nest; but I know that the father and son used to roam about merrily together in search of the nests, and sometimes I would go out and watch them. Now these firs on the side of the hill were so thick that it was not a very easy matter for a man and boy to get through them. The birds were dearly fond of them. You would hardly believe the number of blackbirds and thrushes, hedge-sparrows and chaffinches, which built their nests there every year. The blackbirds and thrushes fixed their houses in the forks of the large branches of the bigger firs; the chaffinches made their pretty little nests of mossy wool, lined with horsehair, upon the overhanging branches of the

larch and Scotch firs; whilst the hedge-sparrows chose the low, thick silver firs, and hid their homes as securely as they could among the twigs of those pretty trees.

But as the father and son crept through the plantations, the former would every now and then call out, "Ned, where are you?" and then if he found a nest, the exclamation "Ho!" would at once summon the boy to his side to see what the newly discovered treasure might be. So I knew in a moment whence came the words, and a ray of hope darted at once through my despairing breast. With a mighty effort I tried to raise a bark, although I was so weak and exhausted that I feared the sound could not reach beyond the limits of my prison cell. I am thankful to say it did.

After another instant of breathless expectation, I heard the Master's voice again: "Ned," it said, "there is a dog in the ground here, I think!" The Boy came running up, and I heard him say, "Oh, look! Papa, what a lot of earth has been scratched out! if he isn't there now, he must have been there very lately!" and then they both stooped down over the hole and listened. I heard them close over me, and I strove hard to bark again.

"Oh, Papa! I hear him quite plain!" shouted Ned; "shall I run for a spade to Epps's? or do you think you can manage this sand with your spud?" The Master replied that he thought a spade would be best, and they both left me for a little while, but presently returned, and I soon heard the spade driven into the ground. Little by little the earth was shovelled away, and at last, to my great joy, a ray of light streamed into the hole, and I was able to push my

nose once more into fresh air. Another moment and my head was free! How surprised they were to see that it was their own poor Fitzy! I drew my body out, and shook myself with intense delight; they patted me, and I only got a *little* scolding for having gone off self-hunting. Perhaps they thought I had been punished enough; I am sure I thought so, and have been very careful about rabbits' holes ever since.

Excepting when I went out on these private hunting expeditions, I usually preferred staying at home, which is after all the best place for a well-disposed dog. At one time, however, I took a fancy to follow the pony-carriage whenever it went out. This reminds me that I haven't mentioned our driving ponies. Dear me! what a number we have had, according to the reports I have heard from various friends who were about the place before me.

Once, long ago, there was a pretty, graceful, fast-trotting pony named Cherry, who was a great favourite, and, like most favourites, came to a sad end, being injured by an accident. He was buried, they tell me, under the great leaning elm in the rose-garden. However, the elm has been blown down since that time, and I hardly know the exact spot now where the poor creature was laid.

Then there was dear old Ladybird—good, sturdy, fast-trotting, honest Ladybird. *She* was a favourite, if you please, and she deserved to be, for she never shirked her work, and was the kindest, best-tempered animal in the world. She puffed and blew, and became very queer in the matter of breathing long before she gave up work; but at last she could stand it no longer, and had to retire from her position

in pony-carriage life and make way for younger—not better—animals.

I remember there were three ponies who aspired to succeed dear old Ladybird. There was one which the Lady of the House got, through a friend of hers, from Scotland, and I heard that they paid a good price for it too. Well, will you believe me? when the creature came down, it was as lame as a tree. I think some kind gentleman tried it just before it left Scotland, and threw it down, or something of the sort; anyhow it was useless for pony-carriage purposes, and had to be sold. The master grumbled, too, I know, for it was a bad bargain for him!

Then there was the Devonshire pony. Some excellent Doctor, also a friend of our Mistress, got this animal for her, and a pretty brown creature it was, to be sure. It cost some money too, I fancy, but it suited little better than the Scotchman. It pulled too much for the pony-carriage, and so the gentlemen took to driving it in the little shooting cart, and were very much pleased with it at first. But one day, as the Master and Mr. Kingscote were driving home from shooting, something happened which changed their opinion of the pretty brown pony. I know the story is true, because Mr. Foord's little dog told me, and you know he lives on the hill coming down from Smeeth church, and consequently saw the whole business. As they drove under the horse-chestnut trees by the stone wall of the churchyard, a chestnut fell from a high branch down into the road. The Master said how easily such a thing as that might startle a horse and cause a bad accident, and (just as if the pony understood him and wanted to show how right he was) the words were

scarcely out of his mouth when this Devonshire darling bolted down the hill, kicking with all his might and main. At the foot of the hill, you know, there are some twenty yards of level ground, and then the road is crossed by the turnpike road, so that there is a sharp angle right and left. Well, they got round all safe and sound, turning somehow or other not homewards, but towards Hythe, and then, straight before them, was a large waggon, coming from the Hop-garden, full of people. Fortunately, instead of bolting up against this, the pony stopped to kick a little more, and kicked Mr. Kingscote clean out of the cart. He held manfully on to the reins, however, and after a bit the pony was seized by a hop-picker who got to its head, and no more damage was done. The cart, however, was a good deal broken, and from that time this Devonshire wonder was no more a favourite, and was soon afterwards got rid of.

But whilst these strangers had been sought for in distant parts, the Master had bought a cheap pony out of a village tradesman's cart, at Brabourne, and meant to use it for the shooting cart. But the best of the joke was, that although the Mistress did not think much of the animal, and hardly fancied him handsome enough for the pony-carriage, little by little he improved, until he became a real treasure, and is now the fastest trotting and best-dispositioned creature you could wish to see,—never sick or sorry, always ready for work, and wanting no whip to make him go as fast as his driver wishes. So you see the most costly creature is not always the best.

Years before I can remember they had a fast pony, but not for long. Sir Edmund and Lady Filmer

came to stay at our house. (What a beautiful Lady she was, and patted me so kindly then, though I daresay she has never thought of me since—whilst *I* have never forgotten *her*—but such is life!) Well, one morning the Master drove Sir Edmund out in the shooting cart; they were going to Combe, I remember, and started in great spirits immediately after breakfast. In less than ten minutes afterwards, I saw them come into the stable-yard dirty and distressed enough! It seems that hardly had they got outside our gate, and turned down the turnpike road, when they met a large Kentish waggon, which, being driven by a Kentish waggoner, naturally wanted the whole place to itself, and kept exactly in the middle of the road. The Master saw there was just room to pass, and drove by accordingly, on his own side, at a fast trot. Unfortunately, however, the fast pony had just cleared the front wheels of the waggon when it took into its head to shy, instantly bringing the cart with great force against the hind wheels, and sending both gentlemen up into the air as if they had been shot out by a gun. The cart was smashed to pieces, and the pony ran wildly up the road until somebody caught him. The Master was a good deal shaken, and Sir Edmund cut his knee; however, they got up and walked back to the House, and, having been duly pitied by their affectionate wives, got another carriage and drove off to the shooting. Sir Edmund had both the guns in his hands at the time of the accident, and according to the account which "Shot," the retriever of that day, gave me, when they arrived late at the wood and told Norris (who was then the keeper) what had occurred, the only observation which fell from that

grave and sagacious man was, "Wonder it hadn't broke the gun-stocks!"

All this, however, was long before the time of our present pet the chestnut pony, who has always been most friendly towards me, and who has long survived the departure of his Scotch and Devonshire rivals.

I have already told you that I sometimes bark at the cows, and perhaps I ought to mention that this arises from no ill-feeling between us, but rather the reverse. I always think cows fair game for a bark—they are such quiet, steady creatures; and if I run and bark at their heels occasionally, it is really more by way of creating a pleasant excitement in their gentle hearts than for any other reason. I have not much to tell you in the way of cow history. We have had a good many at different times, and one of the standing and continual grievances of our dear Mistress is, that we never have cows enough to supply the whole household without buying butter now and then, which she contends should never be the case. The Master, who is a much better hand at saying "Yes" than "No," always refers her to Mr. Foord, the steward, who is supposed to manage all these things. *He* tells her that if they have cows enough to supply the House always, even when it is full of company, the quantity would be too great when the family are alone, and still more so when they are away. Also he says that the servants make off with a good deal by bad management and carelessness; that some of the milk is (very properly) given away to the poor, and the dogs also are to be fed. In fact, he makes all kinds of excuses; but my dear little Mistress brings the grievance up now and again, and argues like a Lord Chancellor—what-

ever that may be. One cow, however, I must specially describe: a big, white cow she was, that we had for a long time, and a real good one she was. Well, last year they took her up out of the field, shut her up in a lodge at the end of the regular new cow-lodge, and determined to fatten her. I used to go with Butcher to feed her sometimes, and it was quite wonderful to see how fat the creature grew. Rather fierce she got, too, from being shut up so long, I suppose, but it came to an end at last. One morning in December, last year, they came with a waggon, with some trouble got Madam Cow to enter it, and drove her off to Ashford fat cattle show. Well, I heard Butcher say afterwards that the worthy old animal got the first prize, and was sold afterwards for forty pounds. One big joint of her came home, I believe; but anyhow just think of the size the animal must have been. Why, she would have fed a dozen dogs for a week at least!

I haven't said anything about our carriage horses yet; one is chestnut and the other black. Very good they *have* been, but are getting somewhat old now, like the rest of us; and as the black horse has been down several times, and the chestnut puffs and blows like a steam-engine, I don't suppose we shall keep them much longer—at least so I heard George the coachman say to Butcher, and I suppose *he* knows.

How short a dog's life is! We don't live half as long as some creatures. I suppose we are too good for this bad world. Anyhow we don't stay in it any great time. What makes me say this is that since I began to write down these recollections of mine my old friend Sailor has departed. I declare it gives me quite a turn to think of it. Only yesterday it seems

that I heard his deep bark, and now the honest voice is silent for ever. He had been ailing for some time, and was indeed somewhat advanced in years, but had seemed better of late, and none of us animals about the House had any suspicion that he was to leave us so soon. The corner in which his kennel stood was rather cold and cheerless, so good, kind Butcher used to move him down to the new cowyard in the day-time, where he was chained near the wood-stack, and taken back at night.

It was one day last week—Easter week—that I was down in the cowyard myself, and saw the old fellow as cheery as usual. The Master came in, and Sailor wagged his tail and welcomed him, receiving a friendly pat on the head in return. Alas! it was almost his last caress! He was taken back to his kennel towards the evening, and when the coachman came in to supper, about nine, he saw the poor old chap lying stark and stiff on the brick pavement in front of the kennel. Dogs do not usually die of heart complaint, I suppose, which is what they would have said if he had been a man; but something inside him must have gone wrong, and whatever the real name of the complaint was, it killed him sure enough. The next day Butcher and Leeds, the under-gardener, carried him down to the group of tall trees in the front meadow, and there they laid him, wrapped up in straw, in a deep grave, close to the spot where, years before I came to the place, a favourite old dog of the Master's—Pincher by name—was laid in a similar grave. Pincher was a black and tan terrier, with a white chest, and came of a famous breed, I believe, being the son of one Vick, a terrier noted for skill and cunning, and still spoken of

with respect by dogs of this neighbourhood. For my own part, I don't set much store by these black and tan terriers—a yelping lot of curs, for the most part, and fitter for a tinker's cart than a gentleman's lawn —a good Scotch terrier is the dog for me, and I wonder people don't all think the same.

Well, I was telling you about old Sailor's funeral. The Master and Mistress and all the children were at it; the Master walked away rather sadly, I thought, but the only tears I saw were in dear Master Ned's eyes. He has a soft heart of his own, that boy, and I know he was thinking of the good-tempered, cheerful old friend he had lost in poor Sailor, and I was glad to see that he was touched and sorry for the old fellow's death. A soft place in a man or boy's heart is a good thing, and one that none of them need be ashamed of. We dogs have the same thing, and feel a good deal more than some people give us credit for. My heart is always inclined to be soft when people are kind to me, and I feel the loss of a friend as much as anyone. Only when other dogs get my bones, or I see myself forgotten and neglected, then my heart becomes like a bit of flint, and I feel as if I should like to make my teeth meet in some other dog's ear if I could.

It isn't safe, though, for a little fellow like me to indulge in such thoughts, and so I lately found out to my cost. I saw Kate come into the stable-yard the other day, after her ride, and that lanky, long-nosed brute Jock with her. So, naturally, I growled at him a little when I went up to say "How d'ye do" to her; and as he poked his face insolently close to me, I made a little snap at his nose, just to teach him to

keep his distance. To my surprise and disgust, the cur instantly ran at me, rolled me over with the mere weight of his lumbering great carcase, and lay there, keeping me down with his clumsy great paws, looking up at Miss Kate as if for approbation. She, however, behaved like a trump, for she called two of the men, who beat the great bully off me, and the matter ended for the time, although it was by no means a pleasant affair.

Well, worse was to follow. After poor old Sailor's death, for some reason or another they took to chaining poor little *me* up in his kennel! The fact is I had been caught in the lambing field, about which I shall say nothing, except that a young lamb is a tender morsel, if killed by accident; though as to interfering with a *live* young lamb, innocent creature, I am sure no one would suspect *me* of such a deed. However, perhaps the bleating old mothers were afraid, or there was some other reason unknown to me. At all events, the result was that, as I say, they chained me up in old Sailor's kennel, which was a most disagreeable circumstance, but one over which I had no control. There was another kind of kennel opposite, against the larder wall, and here they chained Master Jock.

I don't know whether he bore malice or not, but anyhow, one morning when they let him loose, he took offence at some little action of mine, rushed on me, seized me by the throat, tore lots of my long hair out of me, and shook me so furiously that I thought he would have made an end of me then and there. Some of the children and servants came out and beat him well, I am thankful to say, but at my age one can't

stand these kind of shocks, as one could when one was a puppy, and I felt the effects of this assault for some time to come. Since that day I have kept my distance when Jock has been out, and you won't catch me near him again—not if I know it.

The Master let me out the other day and took me to the cricket field; as soon as Jock saw me he pricked up his ears and looked so savage that I crept back and lay down a good way off to watch the game. What an ass that dog does make of himself at cricket! He watches every ball that is bowled or struck; and though he knows perfectly well that he must not touch the ball, he keeps pretending to dash at it, and every now and then *does* rush after it, only to be scolded and told to lie down. A meddling, interfering coxcomb, that is what I call *him*, and would tell him so to his face if I was but a little bigger. But I am not.

Those games of cricket are great fun. Our Ned is a fair "bat" and rather a good bowler; he will make a good cricketer if he will but *persevere*, and not have an idle, "don't-care" way with him, which is fatal to all success in dogs and men alike. I should like to live to hear he is in the "Eton eleven," but he must stick to it if he means to attain that honourable position; and I have great hopes that he will, for he is a good chap, I think, and he knows it will please the home people to see him succeed in games as well as in his work. So I heard the Master say, and I quite believe it.

Cecil is too young to judge of yet, but I think he will try hard to be a good cricketer, and that is the way to *be* one. Young Mr. George Tufton was staying here these Easter holidays; he *is* an amusing fellow, and very civil to dogs too, which is a credit to any boy,

Tippoo wouldn't take to him at all at first, but he came round after a bit. This boy makes a noise like a frog, and like drawing a cork and decanting a bottle of wine, and in fact is as curious a young individual as I have lately seen. I like to see him here, though, and he is a steady "bat" and helps the game. Kimpton, the head gardener, is a useful cricketer all over. I like to hear them chaff him—"old asparagus bed" or "cauliflower" seem very fit names for a gardener, and he takes it all so good-naturedly. But he is an awkward customer to have against you in a cricket match; a pretty good "bat" and straight at the wicket when bowling, and altogether playing with good pluck, which is what I like to see a man do. Man or boy, dog or horse, pluck is the making of the animal; and without it, success is doubly difficult, if not impossible Then there is Kimpton's son, Jemmy, a hard hitter and swift underhand bowler. Goodwin and Leeds also play, who are the other two under-gardeners, the former a very handy fellow, and the latter a bit of a wag in his way, and not very troublesome to the bowlers. All these go to help the game, and now and then the young Tyldens come over from Standford, of which their father is the clergyman. When Master Ned had his cricket matches in the summer, the young Honywoods came down from Evington,—Jack and the twins Philip and Wyndham, and sometimes another or two, I think, of there are more boys at Evington than an honest dog can count; and once I saw their sister Mabel, as jolly a young lady as I ever jumped up to, and as good-natured as a dog could wish. We have a good many visitors sometimes. I am always glad when they

come, for they make the place cheerful, to say nothing of the number of bones, which is largely increased when the house is full, and which a dog is bound to consider.

One of the cheeriest couples that come (speaking as a dog) are Roger Eykyn and his wife. "Mary Mostyn" I hear them call her, but that was her name when she was not married. I don't understand it, for dogs don't do it, but girls change their names when they marry. Well, these two are very lively. Two summers ago we fished a pond when they were here, and oh! to see Roger jump into the mud and wade about after eels! Our Master did so too, though he is almost old and grave enough to know better. He was as bad as any of the boys, though; and as I sat on the bank in the sun and watched them, I thought that men are not a bit wiser than dogs sometimes, although they fancy themselves so much superior. I could tell you about other visitors if I had time, only perhaps some of them might not like being mentioned, and I see that Butcher is just setting off to milk the cows, so I must bring my history to an end, have one little passing bark at that waddling old owl of a duck which I see opposite the stable door, and then go and help my friend in the performance of his daily duties.

III.

THE NOSE.

THERE was once a man who had the misfortune to catch a severe cold in his head. It was so bad that he spent the greater part of his time in blowing his nose; and at last, in a fit of irritation and despair, he blew with such vehemence that his nose came off in his hand. Alarmed and agitated at such a result, he stood for an instant rooted to the ground with dismay, and then suddenly remembering to have heard that delay was dangerous in such matters, he seized his nose in both hands, clapped it at once upon his face, and called to his housekeeper to paste it on. She, good woman, at once perceived that her master had committed the fearful mistake of putting back his nose on his face the wrong side upwards; but, being of a nervous disposition, and well knowing his hot temper and certain displeasure at any delay in obeying his orders, said nothing, but made some paste as rapidly as she could, and then pasted the nose on whilst her master still held it firmly with both hands. This he continued to do until he thought the

paste had well dried and that the nose would be firm and fast; then he hurried at once to the nearest looking-glass, and at the first glance saw what had happened. Of course he flew at once into a furious passion, and so abused his poor housekeeper that she fled at once to the store-room, locked herself securely in, and lived upon raspberry jam for a week, being afraid to come out.

Meanwhile our friend continued in mingled fury and despair. To go about the world with a nose upside down was of course out of the question; to wrench it off again was not to be thought of; to stay indoors for ever was impossible; yet somehow or other the difficulty must be faced and the matter set to rights. When he became a little calmer, he sat down and thought seriously over his position—never was anything at once so unfortunate and so ridiculous. He had a particular objection to being laughed at, being of a proud and reserved temperament; yet laughed at he certainly would be, if he ventured to show his nose outside his door. Boys were proverbially mischievous, and he thought the boys in his neighbourhood were particularly so; they would never give him a moment's peace, and might possibly go to the length of pelting him with mud, or adopt some other equally unpleasant amusement. Then his neighbours: he didn't much value their opinion generally, and, considering himself somewhat superior, had been in the habit of turning up his nose at them—turning up his nose!—he could do so no longer,—there was his nose, already permanently turned up in the most disagreeable manner. Then, again, the most ordinary observations would always seem to be, even if they were not, specially

directed against him. The remark that such and such a thing was "under his nose" would grate painfully upon his sensitive ears. If told to "follow his nose," he could not but feel that it pointed to an upward and impossible flight; and the expression, "as plain as the nose on your face," would for ever henceforward be to him nothing more nor less than a bitter insult.

So he sat and thought over his sad case for some time, and then determined as a first precaution to case his nose carefully round with plaster of Paris. This he did with considerable care, and succeeded in fixing upon his face a beautifully shaped aquiline plaster of Paris nose in the regular way in which regular noses appear upon ordinary faces. In fact, it was rather ornamental than otherwise, and, having painted it of a delicate flesh-colour, he looked at himself in the glass with satisfaction akin to admiration, and sallied forth boldly in the light of day. For some time he was unmolested; one passing exclamation of "Nosey" from an ill-mannered rustic was the only annoyance he experienced, and his heart beat high with hope.

Alas! too soon was this hope dispelled. As he returned to his once happy home, it was necessary that he should pass the village-school, and it so happened that at the moment of his doing so, a whole troop of merry boys came flocking out into the road to go home after their day's schooling had ended. The sight of this large and strange nose was at once too much for them. I don't know why it should have been so, or what there is so ludicrous in this particular feature, that anything wrong with a man's nose seems at once to strike boys as ridiculous. They can pity a

man who has lost an eye; an ear or two more or less attracts but little observation; and you may lose every tooth in your head without danger; but have a queer nose, a twisted nose, a spotted nose, a red nose, or no nose at all, and you instantly become a legitimate object for chaff to all thoughtless boys—and especially schoolboys.

So it was in this case; and the singularity of our friend's nose was no sooner perceived, than a shout of laughter was raised by the village schoolboys; the epithet "Nosey" was employed with greater frequency than politeness; and I grieve to say that on his turning in anger upon the noisy little wretches, he not only met with no sympathy and pity, but the jeers were redoubled, and such evident signs of intended pelting were shown that the man fairly took to his heels and fled from his persecutors. For the next day or two he did not dare to venture out, but at last the inconvenience of his false nose, aggravated by a slight cold in the head, became such that he could stand it no longer, but resolved to seek medical advice without further delay. He accordingly sought the house of the nearest doctor, who received him with great civility, albeit rather astonished at the size and composition of his patient's nose. Being, however, a man with a large practice, and accustomed to curious whims and fancies on the part of certain persons who are, or imagine themselves to be, afflicted with various strange disorders, he requested the man to take a seat and unfold his tale—or rather uncover his nose.

With some few explanatory remarks, not unaccompanied with expressions of pain and sorrow at his

misfortune, the man commenced undoing the plaster of Paris nose, which he then carefully removed, and displayed to the eyes of the astonished doctor the extraordinary spectacle of a nose turned upside down. So strange, indeed, was the appearance before him, that the doctor burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, which threw the patient in an instant into as uncontrollable a fit of passion.

"Is this the way you treat your patients, sir?" he demanded furiously; and, as the doctor continued to laugh, he bestowed upon him so violent a kick on the shins as to convert his laugh at once into a splutter of rage and pain, during which the man replaced his false nose and left the house at once in high dudgeon and in a cab.

He drove off forthwith to the house of a rival practitioner, a doctor whose great intellectual powers were equalled by the large size of his body. Fat he was, very fat, positively unwieldy, but withal of a grave and dignified appearance, which augured well for his serious treatment of the unhappy case before him. The man soon stated his business, and was not backward in relating the thoughtless and unfeeling treatment which he had experienced at the hands of the first doctor; to which the second medical man replied that he was not surprised, but that in fact it was much what he should have expected from the general character and conduct of the individual in question.

Having thus dealt his rival a sly blow, he proceeded to demand full particulars of the patient's case, and to examine into the feature which formed the subject of his misfortune. Before doing so, however, he was accosted by the man in the following manner:—

The Man with the Nose. P. 56.

"Doctor," said he, "I can bear pain, and I know well enough that I shall but too probably have to do so. Ridicule, however, is what I cannot and will not bear, and I therefore ask you fairly whether I can rely upon your grave consideration of my case, and your avoidance of childish and stupid merriment at the misfortunes of another?"

"Sir," replied the doctor with much and becoming dignity, "I have a vast number of patients and an experience of many years. It would be beneath me to yield to such foolish emotions as those which you describe; and, indeed, I have witnessed so many strange forms of sickness and curiosities in disease, that I have now no sensations in my breast other than the most sincere pity for the sufferer."

This sounded so well that our friend said no more, but slowly and carefully undid his nose of plaster of Paris, and disclosed to the doctor the strange deformity beneath. The doctor's face was very near his own as the false nose came off. He saw his eyes twinkle in a curious manner; he watched his face grow redder and redder; and for a moment the stout old gentleman seemed to struggle and pant for breath; and then, with a noise like half-a-dozen kettles boiling over at once, or a small boiler suddenly exploding, he burst forth into such a shout of laughter as seemed likely to terminate his existence at once, or at all events to result in some terrible calamity. His merriment, however, was of short duration, for the enraged patient hit him such a fearful blow exactly on the lowest button of his waistcoat that it doubled him up like a shot, and he went stumbling about the room, holding his hands to his sides and bowing half-way to the earth in pain

and difficulty of breath; whilst our friend, somewhat restored to a better frame of mind at the sight of his tormentor's agony, put on his hat, and went off to the one other regular doctor who was to be found in that neighbourhood.

This was a tall, thin man, with a long, hooked nose of his own, who had by no means so many patients as the other two, and was delighted to receive a new visitor and a fresh case. With great alacrity he provided a chair for our friend, inquired eagerly into all the symptoms of his case, and professed the greatest desire to effect a cure if possible. He threw up his hands in astonishment when told of the laughter of the two doctors previously consulted, and expressed his contempt and astonishment at such unfeeling conduct. He was thankful to say that his own habits were entirely different, and that to deride the misfortune of others was at once foreign to his nature and repugnant to his principles.

The melancholy which appeared seated upon his face seemed to corroborate his statements; and it was with some satisfaction that our friend prepared to submit to the inspection of this worthy and sympathizing doctor. But, alas for the vanity of human hopes and expectations! scarcely had the plaster of Paris nose been removed, when, without even an apparent effort to command his countenance this melancholy individual gave way to an irrepressible burst of laughter, worse and more irritating, if possible, than that of the two other medical gentlemen who had treated the case in so heartless a manner.

Provoked beyond all endurance, our friend seized the tall doctor by the nose and gave it a tweak which

threatened to be followed by the same misfortune as that which had befallen himself. This for a moment stopped the peals of laughter which were so annoying, and, being succeeded by a violent kick judiciously applied, left the poor doctor stretched in no enviable plight upon the floor, whilst the enraged patient hurried down stairs and out of the house. Then came the question—what should he do? Cure was hopeless, if every doctor whom he consulted did nothing but laugh cruelly in his face; yet cure was necessary to render life supportable, and it was therefore impossible to abandon hope without at least another effort.

Then he bethought himself of an old cow-doctor of some celebrity who lived in that part of the world, Jeremiah Washford by name. Why not apply to him? Old Jerry (as he was familiarly called) was a man of great experience; and although his practice generally lay among the inferior animals, yet it was well known that he was frequently consulted by his rustic friends and neighbours, and was reported to have effected several extraordinary cures. Old Mother Bran, afflicted with face-ache, more or less, for two-and-thirty years, had been doctored by Jerry to such purpose that her pain ceased entirely. It is true that she died during the following week, but this might have proceeded from other and accidental causes, and had in no way lessened Jerry's popularity. Then there was Farmer Wilkins, who consulted Jerry about his corns, and who always maintained that the advice he had received, not to wear new shoes and never to stint himself in the articles of beef and ale, had made quite another man of him; whilst it was commonly said, old Dick Fowler never would have died of rheumatism if he could have

afforded to act up to Jerry Washford's advice, wear warm flannel next to his skin and take a hot glass of gin-and-water before going to bed.

All these instances, and many more, recurring to his memory, our friend thought there would be no harm in applying to Old Jerry, who, if he did him no good, would probably do him no harm, and might indeed effect in his case one of his wonderful cures. Therefore he proceeded to Jerry's abode, which was a long, low white cottage with a thatched roof, separated by a narrow strip of garden from the road in front of it, and surrounded by sundry strange old tumbledown buildings and out-houses, wherein your nose soon gave you unmistakeable evidence of the residence of pigs, dogs, cats, pigeons, and all those different kinds of animals which are generally to be found upon the premises of a true old-fashioned farmer or cow-doctor.

A sharp knock at the door had to be twice repeated before it was opened to the afflicted man, and the figure of Old Washford appeared before him. Jerry was clad in a long blue coat with brass buttons, reaching down to his heels, large gaiters, very old and patched corduroys, and a battered old "wide-awake" on the top of his shaggy head. His face and beard gave rise to the immediate suspicion that he had not recently had occasion to make use either of soap, water, or razor, and altogether his general appearance, and a strong odour of gin wafted from the inner room, were scarcely encouraging to a person requiring the performance of a difficult and delicate operation. However, our man having made up his mind upon the subject, lost no time in accosting the individual before him.

"Mr. Washford," said he, "I understand that you are a great hand at effecting cures where others have failed."

Jerry leered knowingly at him, and then replied with a serious air, "I cures pigs—I cures cows—I cures hosses."

"No doubt, no doubt," returned his visitor, "but I want you, if possible, to cure *me!*"

"Be you a hoss? Be you a cow? Be you a pig?" solemnly asked Jerry.

"Bless me," answered the man, "don't stand there talking nonsense; I hear you can doctor other creatures besides dumb animals, and I've a mind to ask your advice on my own case. Look at my nose!"

Jerry looked very gravely for a moment, and then gave vent to his feelings in one word, "False!"

"Yes," said the man, "of course what you see is a false nose; the misfortune lies beneath. In fact, I have had the misfortune to pull off my nose."

"Do it yourself?" said Jerry.

"Yes, I did indeed, I am sorry to say."

"Fool!" gravely replied Jerry.

"Come," rejoined the man, "don't call names, which is both rude and unnecessary; the deed is done and can't be undone: now comes the question of setting it right again."

To this Jerry made no reply, but pointed to a large old-fashioned sofa which stood across the window of his cottage, with all its springs broken and a very old ragged cover upon it. Down sat the man, and then suddenly recollecting what he had already gone through, observed to his strange doctor, "I may as

well tell you, Mr. Washford, that my nose presents a somewhat singular appearance since my misfortune. In fact, three medical men who have inspected it have been unable to restrain themselves from unseemly and insulting merriment, which is a thing I cannot and will not endure. I have made each of them, however, laugh on the wrong side of his face, as the saying is, and I must warn you not to follow their example."

Jerry said not a word to this, but stepping quietly to a corner of the room, produced a sharp pitchfork, which he planted against an old arm-chair close at his right hand, and then, turning round and facing his visitor, he imitated the action of pushing with the pitchfork, and calmly remarked,—

"If I's struck, I prods," which had a considerable and soothing effect upon our worthy friend.

The latter sat calmly whilst Jerry approached and looked him over with a careful eye; he then began to take off the plaster of Paris nose, and in a few moments the upside-down nose, in all its naked deformity, met Jerry's eye. He stepped instantly back to the chair, seized the pitchfork, and, making deliberate prods forward at his patient, indulged all the while in a strange, low, croning kind of chuckle, which was in itself so indescribably ridiculous that the man could hardly help laughing himself in spite of his discomfort and anger.

The sight of the pitchfork, and the evident determination of Jerry to use it in self-defence if necessary, had a good effect in repressing his rising anger; and, with a prodigious effort to command himself, he asked the old cow-doctor whether he thought he could do

anything for him. Jerry paused, took off his wide-awake, scratched his head, hitched up his trousers, and then, laying the pitchfork upon the table, approached his patient slowly and nodded three times in a significant manner.

"What will you do? how will you manage?" eagerly asked the man.

"Set ye still and I'll work 'un," replied Jerry; and, deliberately extending his hand, gently felt the offending nose with his forefinger.

He then produced an old, chipped glass tumbler, which he half filled from the kettle, and into which he dropped something from a glass bottle which he took from the mantelpiece; then, producing a brush, he began to dab the face and nose all over with the liquid, apparently to moisten the paste. Presently he laid down the brush, and without a word good, bad, or indifferent, seized the nose suddenly between his finger and thumb, and twisted it with all his might. So unprepared for this assault was the patient, that for a moment he remained speechless, and then bellowed aloud with mingled rage and agony, and aimed a blow at Jerry which obliged the latter to leave hold of the nose immediately and step hastily back to his pitchfork.

But what had he done? The nose was indeed no longer upside down, but neither was it in its right place. It was fixed in a horizontal position directly across the face, pointing in a straight direction under the left eye, and presenting an appearance more absurdly ridiculous than ever. The poor man was beside himself with pain and fury.

"You old quack, you vile humbug, you treacherous

rapscallion! you pig-doctor, who live in a pig-sty! you abominable old scamp! Oh my nose! my nose!" cried he, ending his sentence with a howl of agony.

The old cow-doctor made no reply, but looked on calmly, holding his pitchfork tightly grasped in his hand for fear of accidents. The man went on abusing him until he had no more words at command, and would probably have taken still more violent steps, but for his wholesome terror of the pitchfork. At last he flung himself furiously out of the cottage, increasing his wrath in no small degree by violently striking the top of his head against the low doorway. He found his way home as well as he could, fortunately meeting no schoolboys and having to endure no ridicule, before he gained the welcome shelter of his own roof. When there, he sat down, nose in hand, to muse over his sad condition; and, when the pain had somewhat subsided, began to doubt whether he had not made rather a fool of himself. Old Jerry had certainly put him to no little pain, but, after all, he could have expected no less. Besides, the nose had certainly moved, and not only moved, but had been turned half-way round, and he who could effect this could probably do more, and would very likely end by refixing the ornament in its natural and proper position. Why, then, had he been so hasty and foolish? He had probably offended the old man (who was well known to be of a somewhat crusty disposition), and might never again have the opportunity of getting cured of his misfortune.

These thoughts flitted quickly through his brain, and made him feel very uncomfortable. Still he was too proud and shy to return to Jerry's cottage, and

so sat brooding over his misery for some time, and tried to bear the one-sided condition of his nose as best he might. But even his servants could now scarcely look at him without laughing, although they well knew that instant dismissal would assuredly be the penalty of detection. You never saw anything so absolutely ludicrous as our friend appeared; no one who had not seen him could have believed such a thing possible, and to appear in society in such a state was simply out of the question. For several days, therefore, he kept indoors, hoping against hope that some change for the better might possibly occur. At the end of that time, exercise being absolutely necessary to him, he sallied forth for a short walk, but in a sad state of nervous agitation lest he should meet any one who would remark his extraordinary appearance.

In fact his sensitive disposition rendered this state of things so intolerable that he very soon re-entered his house, and made up his mind once more to seek the aid of the renowned Jerry. So he hastened off to the low cottage, knocked at the door, and presented himself again before the old man. The latter looked at him with a grim smile, which under any other circumstances would have excited his wrath. However, being quite determined to be cured if possible, he kept his temper under good command, and accosted Jerry with great politeness.

"Mr. Washford," he said, "I fear—I know—I was somewhat hasty the other day. A man's nose is not to be trifled with, and the pain which you inflicted upon me by your well-intentioned efforts caused me to be somewhat intemperate in my language and conduct. I hope, however, that I gave you no offence, and I show

my confidence in your skill by coming back and asking you to complete your cure."

Jerry looked at him steadily for a moment, and then said somewhat sharply, "Nose bad?"

"Not absolutely bad, Mr. Washford, but decidedly uncomfortable, and, as you will see, in a very awkward position."

"Want to be cured?"

"Certainly I do; that is the reason of my returning to your house."

Jerry pointed to the sofa and merely remarked "Sit down," which the patient accordingly did.

Without saying a word, the cow-doctor then proceeded to take from a cupboard in the corner of the room several large red handkerchiefs of a curious pattern, somewhat torn and rather dirty, and, approaching his visitor, wound one of them round his right arm and began to fasten it to one of the arms of the sofa.

"Hallo!" shouted the man, "what are you up to? What do you want to do?"

"Mustn't struggle, must sit still to be cured," answered Jerry; and although our friend didn't above half like it, he thought it best to submit, as his only chance of recovery seemed to be dependent upon the present operation.

With a second handkerchief Jerry tied his left arm fast to the back of the sofa, which was easy enough to do, as the holes therein enabled him to bind the handkerchief round the wood-work, and he then set to work and tied both the man's legs, one to a leg of the sofa and another to a huge arm-chair which stood close by, and down upon which Jerry sat when his victim had been securely fastened. After looking at

him very steadily for a few moments, Jerry arose and carefully felt the nose all over. Then he again took the chipped tumbler, again filled it, and again daubed face and nose carefully. Then as if not satisfied with his preparations, he produced a small pomatum pot, filled with a species of grease, the smell of which was anything but pleasant, but with which he thickly besmeared the unfortunate nose; after which, taking in his hands a cloth by no means of the cleanest, he seized the unfortunate member between his finger and thumb and twisted it furiously.

The cries of the unhappy man were fearful. Never had he endured such agony in his life, and he would certainly have aroused the neighbourhood, if Jerry had not stuffed a red handkerchief into his mouth, which very nearly choked him. But at last, after pulling, twisting, and straining, suddenly the nose went back into its place with a regular "click" like a spring; and Jerry Washford, relinquishing his hold with a grin of delight, exclaimed in a cheerful tone, "That's clinched him!"

And so it had. Right and tight as ever nose on mortal face, the nose of the unhappy sufferer was to be seen in all its glory. Pain indeed he still felt, and pain of no ordinary description, but the nose was straight. He now begged to be unfastened, and to this Jerry having agreed, proceeded to set him free. But, before finishing the process, he once more dived into his mysterious cupboard, and fished out a curious little wooden box of ointment, which he told his patient to rub daily on and around the nose for the next few days, as thereby the pain would be removed and the organ strengthened.

On being released from his red chains, our friend's first act was to rush up to an old bit of broken glass which hung against the wall, and to make himself perfectly sure that his nose was really safe and sound. He then turned to Jerry and heaped upon him a perfect volume of thanks and praises, to which the old man listened without the smallest signs of pleasure, merely remarking in his own peculiar way, "Not the first nose I've twisted," which was probably a true remark.

The rest of the story need hardly be told. For the remainder of his life the man lived happily and contented with his restored nose, which, indeed, he valued all the more for its adventures. Strange to say, the perils through which it had passed seemed to have had an excellent effect upon this feature, which never afterwards troubled its owner upon the occasion of his having a cold in his head, but always refused to catch cold under any circumstances whatever. Would that other noses would follow such an example! The man himself learned several useful lessons from the misfortune which had befallen him. He never poked his nose into other people's affairs, having had such a nasal affair of his own as to make him disinclined to run any risks with his recovered ornament. On the other hand he turned up his nose at nobody, but pitied all those who had fallen into misfortune, knowing so well what it was to suffer. He learned too, that when anything went wrong with him it was better not to make it worse by his own conduct, which would be cutting off his nose to spite his face with a vengeance. Altogether I think this accident led him to lead a better and a happier life, and was on the whole a fortunate event

in his existence. Nor did he prove himself to be of an ungrateful disposition. He made Jerry a handsome present at once, and offered to do much more. He wished to move the worthy cow-doctor from his tumble-down old cottage and to place him in a better house of his own. But home was home to the old man, and he steadily refused to move. Then his patient offered to build a bran new house on the site of the old cottage, or at least thoroughly to repair the latter, to pull away all the old tumble-down pigsties and out-buildings, and to replace them by new and good ones. But to all these proposals Jerry steadily responded with a negative shake of the head. To him "Home was home, were it never so homely." The old battered walls of his humble cottage, the thatched roof and low doorway, the tumble-down out-buildings and venerable pigsties, were all part and parcel of his existence; the very dirt of the place was dear to him, and to have had his house and himself thoroughly cleaned would probably have been the death of him. So, although he accepted the handsome present which his patient made him, and was always open to an offer of pipes and "'baccy," he entirely refused either to move from his old cottage or to allow any improvements to be made therein. "Leave I as I is" was his saying, and, had he moved in a higher sphere, might have been his motto, accompanied as it should have been, by way of a crest, by a blue coat and brass buttons, or two pigs rampant against a pigsty.

Long lived Jerry in his happy abode, and longer still would he probably have lasted, if in a moment of temporary illness and weakness he had not unfortu-

nately called in a regular doctor, who finished him off in less than a week, and then laid it all to his previous life and habits, which, as Jerry had never had a day's illness in his life before, was, to say the least of it, rather bold. But doctors who lose a patient *must* have an excuse for it, and this was perhaps as good a one as could be found. Our re-nosed friend greatly regretted the loss of the man who had restored him to himself and rendered his life once more endurable. Never, indeed, did he look at himself in the glass without casting back a thought to the time of his strange adventure and stranger cure, and not unfrequently did he heave a sigh to the memory of the homely cow-doctor, who, self-taught and self-reliant, had so dealt with him in his hour of trouble as to enable him to put a better face upon the matter, once more to display his countenance boldly in the light of day, and, in all his future journeys through a troublesome and dangerous world, to go on in a straightforward manner, and follow his nose without fear of annoyances.

IV.

MULLIGATAWNY.

THERE was once a king who had almost everything in the world which the heart of man could desire. He had a prosperous people to reign over, a kingdom rich and large, and to which he had added by unvarying success in war against neighbouring kings; his army was large, his navy powerful, his subjects contented, his ministers always ready to tax the people when he wanted money, and his people delighted to pay the taxes when they were asked to do so. In fact you might have taxed them even down to their lucifer matches without a grumble. Moreover he was blessed with such good health that a doctor's bill was a thing unknown in the royal household, especially as the queen, who was one of the most beautiful women ever heard of, was of as strong a constitution as her royal spouse, and her nine maids of honour and nine pages were equally hearty. The queen was devoted to the king; he on his side was as fond of the queen as she could possibly wish, and nothing appeared to be wanting to complete their happiness.

However, since no one can expect to be perfectly happy in this world, the royal couple had their sorrow, which consisted in the fact of their having no children. It was the most provoking thing in the world, and the more so inasmuch as the king's country was one in which children generally abounded. It was astonishing what large families the labouring people and others, especially the curates and poorer clergymen, invariably had, and yet in the palace there was no nursery—no sound of merry little feet pattering about overhead, and laughing voices resounding along the passages and on the stairs. Years rolled away and the same state of things continued, so that the king and queen really became positively unhappy. Melancholy reigned throughout the court circle, for the courtiers naturally followed the example of their master; and he, poor man, grew listless and careless about everything, left off hunting in the middle of a run, stopped shooting before he came to the best corners, lost his skill at croquet, quite gave up dancing, and rarely got beyond his second bottle of claret after dinner.

Fancy then the change and surprise which occurred at court when it was one day announced by authority that the long-cherished wishes of the royal couple were about to be fulfilled, and when in due time it became known that a princess had been born! Joy spread throughout the whole kingdom. Bonfires blazed on the crest of every hill. Oxen were roasted whole and devoured with the greatest enthusiasm. Flags waved from every church steeple, bells rang, bands played, boys shouted, men hurrah'd, women embroidered handkerchiefs with devices complimen-

tary to king and queen, everybody was as delighted as they could possibly be, and the nine royal pages kissed the nine maids of honour with enthusiastic loyalty. Never were rejoicings known so great and so general.

The king, overjoyed at the long-desired event, determined to give a great feast in honour of his little daughter, who on that self-same auspicious day was named with thirteen names, which I should be happy to tell you if I was quite sure about the spelling of some of them. As, however, I am rather doubtful upon this point, I will content myself with telling you the name by which it was settled that the baby child should be called, which was none other than Cassandra; this being a name for which the queen happened to have a particular fancy. So, therefore, it was settled, and the king invited all the principal people in his country to the feast. Of course there was one table especially reserved for the royal family and the very greatest of the nobility, but the matter was so well arranged by my Lord Dignity, the high chamberlain of the court, that everybody was believed to be perfectly contented with the place assigned to him or her, and all seemed likely to pass off with the most perfect success.

One doubt had indeed arisen concerning the banquet, but it was hoped that this had been satisfactorily settled. The queen had an old aunt, who lived in a distant part of the country, and was generally reputed to be a dealer in magic arts to such an extent as to deserve the title of Witch. She was very rich, but of a sour and crabbed disposition, and one of those persons whom it is almost impossible to please,

because they seem determined to take offence at anything and everything if they can find the slightest pretext for doing so. Now the king and queen had greatly doubted whether it would be desirable to ask this old lady to Cassandra's feast. They would much rather have been without her, but then, on the other hand, they did not like to offend her, and they held a little consultation upon the point. The king, however, being of a good-natured disposition, and especially ready to be friends with all the world upon this joyful occasion, settled the point by declaring that old Aunt Martha should certainly be invited, and invited she accordingly was. As, however, she returned no answer whatever to the invitation, the king and queen supposed that she thought it too far to come, and accordingly the chief table was filled up with other guests, and nothing was heard or seen of the old lady when the banquet commenced.

All went on well and merrily, the wine passed freely round, and everybody drank long life, health, and happiness to the infant princess. The usual fairies were of course present, all of whom gave her some precious gift, from the effects of which she was to become good, clever, beautiful, and everything else which, as we all know, fairies can arrange for baby princesses with such perfect ease. A lucky princess indeed would this one be, if all the good happened to her which was promised that day! And when the baby Cassandra's health had been drunk with "nine times nine and one cheer more," and the presents had been given and the speeches made, and everybody was at the height of their enjoyment, the king rose up to thank his guests once for all for the warmth and

cordiality of their congratulations. He rose up and immediately there was a dead silence, and everybody listened in breathless expectation to hear what the king would say.

But instead of the king's voice, at that very instant there came quite a different sound from a side door near the foot of the chief table, which was suddenly thrown open. "Stop a moment, good people, wait for *my* present," said a harsh, grating voice, and a figure stepped forward in the doorway.

It was the figure of a tall, gaunt old woman, clad in a dusty, ill-made black dress, which seemed very unfit for that gay assembly. She leant upon a crutch, and flourished another crutch in the air so close to the head of old Fuddlewits, the chief butler, that he shrank into a corner and made himself as small as possible, though the old woman heeded him no more than if he had been a wax figure. She limped forward and glared so frightfully upon the company that the queen shrieked aloud, as immediately did the nine maids of honour, and the nine pages groaned audibly in chorus. The new comer was indeed capable of glaring with some effect, for when her ugly old bonnet was stuck well back on her head, so that her countenance could be seen, it was a countenance more repulsive than anything you can imagine. Cruel, staring eyes, a long nose with a great red lump on the end of it, high cheek-bones, two large prominent teeth sticking out over the lower lip, and a grizzly beard like a man's (and an unwashed man's too), completed the picture. And as she hobbled up the hall nearer and nearer to the queen, by whose side had been placed the cradle with the royal infant, she exclaimed

in the same harsh, disagreeable voice which had already so unpleasantly interrupted the harmony of the evening, "Wait for me, good people, wait for me. Make room for Aunt Martha!"

Aunt Martha indeed it was, the dreaded creature over whose absence the king and queen had secretly rejoiced, but who was there after all! Nearer and nearer she came, until she was quite close to the cradle, and scowled down upon the little Cassandra, who instantly began to cry, so great an effect had Aunt Martha's scowl even upon a baby's feelings.

"Ho! ho!" laughed the old crone. "So this is the chick ye are all making so much of! a puny creature forsooth! And just one cold invitation was enough for Aunt Martha—no pressing *her* to come, indeed, and better away, I trow. No place kept at the first table, and the babe named, I'll warrant, by some outlandish name, instead of being called after her own mother's flesh and blood. Now, Sir King, had ye asked *me* to have been Godmother to the child, and named her after Aunt Martha, ye had done well! But Aunt Martha wasn't grand enough, wasn't she? I'll be even with ye though, ye varlets! Here I am, and here is my gift to your fine princess. Gifts, I see, she has already. She is to be good, clever, beautiful, rich. Now for *my* gift. She shall grow up all that has been promised, but if anyone ever says the word 'mulligatawny,' in her presence, she shall be changed into a black rabbit directly, and shall never resume her form until a person shall be found of royal birth who will drink off a pint of hot mulligatawny soup out of a crystal goblet without looking at it or taking breath."

As soon as the wicked old woman had pronounced

these words, the queen fainted upon the floor; so immediately did the nine maids of honour, and the nine pages set to work to "bring them to" again by continual slappings on the back without a moment's delay. The king jumped from his seat in mingled fury and consternation, and a general confusion followed. Aunt Martha, however, glaring and grinning at the whole party with general and impartial malice, brought her crutch down with all her force on old Fuddlewits's gouty foot, which made him howl horribly, and then hobbled quietly off, muttering to herself, and no one venturing to stop her. After a while the queen came to herself again, upon which the maids of honour at once followed her example, and told the pages they had been exceedingly officious in trying to "bring them to" before.

The king gradually recovered his self-possession; and although the life and spirit of the feast were gone, he tried to make things as pleasant as possible, and get through the evening as best he could. The next day, however, he called a council of his ministers, and gravely consulted them as to what should be done. There could be little doubt either of Aunt Martha's malice or her power, and it was greatly to be feared that the catastrophe which she had threatened would some day or other occur, unless means were taken to prevent it. Accordingly, after much deliberation, a law was passed forbidding any person in that country to use the word "mulligatawny" under any circumstances, upon pain of immediate banishment and the payment of a large fine. The word was ordered to be scratched out of every dictionary or other book in which it was to be found, and the utmost precautions

were to be taken that it should never by any chance reach the ears of the little princess.

And so she grew from a little baby into a toddling child, and from a toddling child into a school-girl, and from a school-girl into an almost grown-up young lady without ever hearing the fatal word. What made it more difficult, however, to keep it from her was her immense partiality for the particular soup known by the name of "mulligatawny." "That hot soup," she used to call it, and so often did she ask for it, that the word would almost certainly have been pronounced by some of the servants, had they not been restrained by their dread of the law, and their knowledge that several persons had actually been fined and banished for having accidentally broken it.

So time passed on, until the princess had entered upon her fifteenth year, and people had almost forgotten the strange circumstances which had occurred at her christening. Then, one day, the king came laughing into the queen's morning room, holding a letter in his hand.

"From whom is that letter, dear husband?" said the queen, "and at what are you laughing?"

"This letter," answered the king, "is from my old Aunt Sally."

"Dear me," said the queen, "I had quite forgotten that you had such a relation."

"Well," returned the king, "and so in truth had I. Aunt Sally, as you will now recollect, went to India at a very early age, where she married a native prince. When he died, she managed, I know not how, to be maintained in the possession of his wealth and palace, and has gradually accumulated a very large sum of

money. It seems, however, that after many years of tranquil reign, she no longer feels secure or happy in India, and has determined to revisit her own country. I need hardly say that so distinguished and rich a relative must be received with due honour, and I was laughing at the thought of the changes she will find here, and the way in which our people will be surprised at her probably strange ways of living."

The queen quite agreed with the king, that his worthy aunt should be received with all the consideration due to her rank and relationship to the royal family, and for the next few days much time was spent in making the necessary preparations. Apartments were provided in the palace, a suite of followers was specially told off for the ex-sovereign, and all was done that tender and respectful forethought could suggest. At last the eventful day arrived, and a huge carriage rolled up to the door, followed by several other vehicles of somewhat less pretentious appearance. Then the big drums beat and the bands began to play, and a long line of guards presented arms, and a vast train of servants hurried forward to receive the king's aunt, who descended from her carriage by the aid of two gigantic native servants, and entered the palace forthwith.

She was a very large, fat woman, with enormous gold earrings in her ears and massive gold bracelets on her arms, and a wonderful gold chain round her neck. She had a large, round, good-natured face, great grey eyes, a mouth the size of which would have disfigured her face had not a remarkably pleasant smile continually lighted it up, and a regular double chin, such as very few people possess except

those who are blest with an excellent temper. Aunt Sally waddled rather than walked along the corridors and up the grand staircase; and when the king met her with courtly and respectful gravity at the top of the stairs, she threw herself into his arms with such affectionate vehemence as to throw him completely off his balance, and down they both came upon the marble floor. However, the nine maids of honour, the nine pages, and all the courtiers rushed immediately to the rescue, and in a few moments the king and his aunt were upon their legs again; and the worthy old lady, having kissed the queen with a sound which echoed through the whole place, plumped herself down upon the nearest sofa with a force which shook the palace from top to bottom, and made every window in the room rattle again.

The young princess was now introduced to her great-aunt, and these little formalities having been accomplished, the king stepped forward with his most graceful bow, and inquired of his respected relative whether she would allow him to escort her to the dining-room, in which luncheon had been prepared. Giving herself a little composing shake as she replied, the innocent old lady pronounced the following words in answer to the king.

"Thank you, my dear nephew, it is but little luncheon that I ever take, but after my long drive I should dearly like a glass of madeira and a basin of hot mulligatawny soup!"

Oh, horror of horrors! what evil Fate had induced the king to keep his venerable relative in ignorance of his child's danger? What cruel destiny had prompted Aunt Sally to utter these words of doom?

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Scarcely had they left her lips when a fearful scream from the unhappy queen rang through the palace, closely followed by screams as nearly similar as possible from the nine maids of honour, and terrible groanings from the nine pages. In an instant—in less time than it takes me to write the words—the dreaded Fate had come to pass, and, instead of the young and lovely princess who but one previous moment had stood before them, a beautifully shaped black rabbit ran squeaking under the sofa.

The confusion which followed was something terrible to witness. The king, utterly broken-hearted, felt all his fortitude desert him, and, throwing himself upon the ground, sobbed like a child. The courtiers, as in duty bound, and acting indeed according to their natural inclinations under the melancholy circumstances of the case, sobbed bitterly also, whilst the unhappy and innocent author of the misfortune opened her eyes exceedingly wide, remained perfectly silent with terror and astonishment for a few seconds, and then went off into a fit of hysterics, in which her struggles and spasms were of so violent a character that she broke down the best sofa and smashed two curiously wrought chairs which the king particularly valued. In the midst of this scene of woe, the door of the apartment was suddenly thrown open, and who should present herself to the eyes of the weeping court but Aunt Martha herself. Her eyes sparkling with malignant pleasure, her countenance more repulsive than ever, and her crutch brandished wildly over her head, she croaked out her delight in harsh and cruel accents. "Ho, ho, good people! where is your fine princess now? I told you so! I told you so!

How do you like Aunt Martha's present? Ho, ho, ho!" and she burst out into a chuckle of wicked exultation.

The sound of her voice recalled the poor king to himself. "Vile witch!" he exclaimed as he sprang to his feet, "your evil prophecy has indeed come true, and you have cruelly injured those who never harboured even an unkind thought towards you! What is the reason of your base and malicious action against me and mine?"

"Ho, ho," croaked back the old woman in reply, "the king calls names! Poor man, he is beside himself with grief for the loss of his pink-cheeked daughter. Witch, forsooth! Perhaps you'll think more of Aunt Martha now you know her power. Ho, ho!" and again she laughed cruelly and scornfully.

But now the poor queen, who had somewhat recovered from her swoon, threw herself at the feet of the wrinkled hag, and besought her in piteous terms to have mercy. "Oh, Aunt Martha, Aunt Martha," she exclaimed, in tones which one would have thought likely to melt the hardest heart, "how can you thus destroy our happiness? Have mercy on my darling child! Have pity on your poor niece! Oh, give me back my precious one, and I will bless you for ever!"

"Hoity, toity," returned the old woman with a sneer, "how fine a thing to see Mrs. Queen on her knees to old Aunt Martha! But it won't do, my royal niece, it won't do! You thought little of the poor old aunt till you knew her power, and now you shall feel it. Your daughter shall never resume her shape until she can find a person of royal birth who will drink off a pint of hot mulligatawny soup

out of a crystal goblet without taking breath or looking at it."

So saying, she turned slowly on her heel, pointed with a wicked leer to the poor trembling rabbit which was fearfully peering out from under the sofa, tauntingly asked the king whether he thought he should roast his daughter or have her boiled with onions, and hobbled down the grand staircase without anyone daring to interfere with her. It is difficult to imagine or to describe the state of the court during the rest of that day, which was entirely given up to wailing and lamentation. It was not until the morrow that the king found sufficient resolution to summon his ministers, and take counsel with them as to the best course to be adopted under the distressing circumstances in which he found himself placed. As the words of the wicked old witch had come true, so far as they related to the change which the Princess Cassandra should undergo if she ever heard the fatal word, it was but natural to suppose that the remainder of the prediction might be relied upon with equal certainty.

The first step, however, which prudence suggested, was the making due provision for the security of the black rabbit. This was a matter which required immediate and careful consideration. Black rabbits were not uncommon in the king's country, and the king felt a cold shudder through his whole frame as he remembered how many of these animals he had shot with his own gun. Unless, therefore, all shooting of rabbits was entirely forbidden throughout the kingdom, the unhappy victim of a great-aunt's malice

could never leave the palace with safety. Moreover, the people of that country were so fond of shooting, and objected so much to rabbits as crop-devouring animals, that any law which would have the effect of preventing their destruction would be exceedingly unpopular. Besides, to render the poor princess perfectly secure, it would not be sufficient to forbid the use of guns against the tribe of rabbits—nets, traps, wires, ferrets, all must be forbidden ; and when this had been done, even if the people loyally and faithfully obeyed the law, a dog, a cat, a fox, a stoat might at any moment take that precious life for the preservation of which such wondrous precautions had been devised.

No, there was nothing for it but to confine the poor little animal entirely to the palace, and to banish from the precincts thereof anything and everything which might be dangerous to rabbit life. Accordingly, a most beautiful hutch was made by the king's chief carpenter, an oak hutch, with three spacious compartments, one of which was faced with gold bars, another with silver bars, and the third entirely shut out from the light, so that the royal rabbit might sleep without disturbance. The sweetest hay was daily placed in this latter compartment, which was in fact the princess's bedroom, and in the other two divisions soft carpets were laid, upon which the little animal might sport and play, if, indeed, the misfortune of which it was the victim could have left it any inclination for the joyous gambols of an ordinary rabbit. Every day the queen, poor distracted mother, would bring with her own hand the most delicate parsley, the nicest celery, the freshest lettuces, the tenderest blades of

grass, and feed her ill-fated daughter, who looked up into her face with large liquid sorrowful eyes, which seemed as if they spoke words of love and comfort to the broken-hearted parent. Day by day, too, the poor queen would sit for hours together with the black rabbit in her lap, weeping over her ill-fated child, and stroking her with tender but unavailing love.

Aunt Sally's grief was as loud as it was sincere. She blamed herself often and bitterly, although, poor soul, never having heard of Aunt Martha's gift, she was perfectly free from blame; and so the king and queen told her, for in all their sorrow they were kind and just. The worthy old woman declared that she would do anything in the world to restore her great niece to her former self, and that if Aunt Martha would be thereby conciliated, she was perfectly ready to become a rabbit or even a rat as a substitute for the youthful victim. Then, taking a new idea into her head, she declared that as *she* was of royal birth, she would herself fulfil the conditions upon which alone Cassandra could regain her human shape. She accordingly ordered a pint of hot mulligatawny soup, and offered to drink it off without looking at it or taking breath, in the presence of the whole court. It was pointed out to her that the words of the old witch evidently referred to a gallant gentleman, and not to an affectionate aunt, as the person by whose devotion the cure could be wrought, and that she might possibly choke herself without any beneficial result. In spite of this suggestion, however, she ordered the soup, and, after a preliminary biscuit, prepared to drink it. Unfortunately, however, she had whilst in India contracted the habit of winking her left eye and slapping the table with

her right hand when partaking of any liquor which suited her taste, and being very fond of mulligatawny, she closed her eyes indeed as she raised the goblet to her lips; but when half through it, nothing could overcome the force of habit, and as she began winking with her left eye, she naturally opened her right and looked at the soup, thus breaking the conditions upon which alone success could have attended the operation. This at least was the story current among the courtiers after it was found that no result whatever followed the swallowing of the soup by the good old lady, save and except her immediately requiring half a bottle of the king's best madeira after it.

It was evident, however, to the wise men of the court, and to the cabinet ministers (who, strange to say, were some of them wise men too), that what the witch had meant was that the person of royal birth who should liberate the princess from her cruel doom should be one who should afterwards become her husband and share her throne, when in the course of time she should succeed to it. After much consultation, therefore, an advertisement was drawn up and inserted in all the newspapers of that country and of the neighbouring states, to the following effect:—

"WANTED IMMEDIATELY.

"A young man of Royal Birth, who can swallow a pint of hot mulligatawny soup without looking at it or taking breath. Any person performing this feat will be rewarded with the hand of a lovely princess WITH A LARGE DOWRY. Apply to Lord Dignity, King's Court"—and then followed the address.

As may well be supposed, this advertisement

attracted a great deal of attention, especially among those who could by hook or by crook make out that they were of royal birth. It is surprising how many unmarried gentlemen, claiming relationship with royalty, made application to the Lord High Chamberlain. Some were old and some were young, but all were determined to try their luck, and every one of them was perfectly sure that he could fulfil the required conditions. But they all failed miserably. One kept his eyes shut until he was three parts through his soup, and then thoughtlessly opened one eye to see if he had not nearly finished ; there was no second trial for anybody, so *he* was done for. Another went bravely at it, but so fast that he was obliged to stop and take breath in the middle, so *his* chance was gone. A third choked dreadfully at the second gulp, and fled away spluttering with shame and rage. A fourth found the soup burn his mouth so that after the first swallow he swore he wouldn't go through with the business for all the princesses in Christendom; and a fifth actually dropped the crystal goblet out of his hands as soon as the hot soup touched his lips, whereby he spoilt a beautiful new table-cloth, scalded his own knees rather badly, and got kicked downstairs into the bargain for his awkwardness.

So for three years the matter went on, and no one appeared or seemed likely to appear who could fulfil the conditions upon which alone the Princess Cassandra could be restored to her afflicted parents. Three long, weary, sad years they were, and with deep grief the king and queen observed to each other that, if all had gone well, their dear daughter, now entering upon her eighteenth year, would have been the life and

soul of the court, with no need to advertise for a husband, but in all probability surrounded by adoring princes from every quarter of the globe!

Whilst they were one day indulging in these regrets and thinking over what might have been, in the usual manner of persons who have, or who fancy they have, reason to be dissatisfied with what *is*, a messenger was announced who craved audience of the king, which was immediately granted. Upon entering the royal presence, the messenger, who was richly clad in crimson and gold, and, by his polished manners and high bearing, was evidently of noble descent, bowed low before the king, and declared his errand was one of much importance. He came, said he, from a neighbouring monarch who had once been possessed of a kingdom nearly as large and power almost as great as that of the father of our unfortunate princess. During the early part of the latter's reign, war had broken out between the two countries, and our king had inflicted several severe defeats upon his neighbour. Elated by success, he had instantly determined upon annexing to his own kingdom some of his neighbour's territory, although the people of the same would much rather have remained as they were, and his policy was sure to foment and to perpetuate a feeling of bitterness and hostility between the two nations. However, the king was determined to annex the province in question, and accordingly did so. There was a last fierce battle over the business, in which the king was again victorious, and in single conflict with the only son of the other king, he struck him a blow which resulted in the total blindness of the young prince. Disheartened by his defeat, and still more so by the

grievous affliction which had fallen upon his beloved son, the other king gave up his province and made peace as soon as he could. Since that time he had lived quietly at home, and contented himself with the management and improvement of his own kingdom.

The memory, however, of the wrong which had been done him rankled in his breast and in the hearts of his people, and it was known that he bore no love to the monarch to whom he owed his loss and his sorrow.

The young prince, however, was of a gentle disposition, and, having heard the sad tale of Cassandra's misfortune, was impressed with a strong desire to afford her aid, and with a fixed belief in his ability to do so. As to looking at the hot soup, that, poor fellow, was an impossibility for him, and he was therefore unlikely to break that part of the conditions upon which the princess could be restored to her former shape. The only difficulty would be in the drinking a whole pint of liquor, and that *hot* liquor, without drawing breath, and this was not a difficulty to be encountered without preparation. The prince therefore set himself studiously to the task: beginning with a small quantity, and gradually increasing it, he daily accustomed himself to swallow mulled wine, spiced ale, liquid jelly, and soup, warmer and warmer each day, until he was really able to drink, without taking breath, a quantity which it would have puzzled many a tippler to dispose of. But now arose a new and unforeseen obstacle. He had kept his intentions so entirely to himself, that no one about the court knew the why or the wherefore of his daily warm drinks, and it was not until he felt pretty certain of success that he one day told the

whole of his plan to the king, his father. On hearing it, to his indescribable surprise and sorrow, the king flew into a violent passion, and declared that he would never permit such a thing for a moment. What! save—and then marry—the daughter of the enemy who had been the cause of so much misery to their country, and robbed her of one of her finest provinces! Sooner might he and all his line perish! The robber king who had despoiled their land was justly punished by the evil which had befallen his daughter, and, instead of trying to relieve him from his distress, it would be better to take the opportunity to make war and wrest back from him his unlawfully taken prize. In this strain the king broke forth, and so fumed and raged over it that the young prince durst not say any more for the life of him. But his heart had been so entirely set upon his favourite plan, that his father's opposition came too late to induce him to give it up. Indeed he could not do so if he would; it was his dream day and night, and to forget the subject was impossible.

His father having forbidden the further mention of the scheme, the prince had no hope of convincing him by argument. He therefore took the natural and reasonable course of beginning to fret, refusing his victuals, and making everybody about him thoroughly uncomfortable. His beard remained unshaven, his face grew thin and haggard, his clothes hung loosely upon his limbs, and it was evident to the whole court that he was in a bad way. The queen, his mother, tried homœopathy in vain: "Aconite" was no good; "Belladonna" was worse than useless; "Nux" entirely failed; then she fell back upon the good old-fashioned remedies, — rum and milk, tumblers of

melted jelly, hot posset, and all kinds of mixtures the very sound of which carries comfort with it. But they were all of no avail, for as the young prince wisely, though somewhat testily, observed, when your heart is in trouble what is the use of pampering your stomach? So after a while the queen left off her doctoring, and coaxed her son till he told her what was really the matter, and how he had set his heart upon trying to save and to win the Princess Cassandra.

Now the queen loved her country, and had been as angry as anyone when the province had been taken. Inasmuch, however, as she loved her son better than anything else in the world, and as her anger against the father of the Princess Cassandra was much more on account of the injury he had done to the prince than the wrong he had inflicted upon the country, she was not long before she came quite over to her son's views, and promised to speak to the king her husband upon the matter. She soon found an opportunity of doing this, and although his majesty burst out in a passion at first, she soon brought him to reason by some of those winning ways which queens as well as other women can generally employ when they have some favourite point to carry, and before long she induced him to talk to the prince upon the subject. The latter then pointed out to him that his whole heart was bent upon this plan, and that, if he succeeded, it could only lead to a renewal of friendship between the two countries which could scarcely fail to be beneficial to each. If, on the contrary, he should fail, matters could be no worse than they were at present, and no harm would have been done to anybody.

Then, after a long talk, the king allowed himself to be so far persuaded as to give his consent to negotiations being opened. He insisted, however, that he himself should send the message by which the business should be begun, and accordingly he dispatched one of his chief lords to the court of his ancient enemy, who was received as we have seen. Being somewhat doubtful how to begin, he bowed and scraped so much that the queen positively smiled, whereupon the nine maids of honour instantly did the same, and the nine pages chuckled audibly, upon which the king turned round and frowned, the queen directly blushed deeply, the nine maids of honour blushed more deeply still, and the nine pages tried to do the same, but signally failed in the attempt. Then the great lord delivered his message, which was to the following effect. The king, his master, sent to the king of that court a friendly and brotherly greeting. He had heard with deep sorrow the sad affliction which had fallen upon the family of his brother sovereign, in the melancholy transformation of his lovely daughter into one of the inferior animals. He also had suffered in his family, as he would remind his brother, through the blindness of his dear and only son, arising from a cause to which delicacy forbade him further to allude. The thought had struck him, or rather his son, that the one misfortune might possibly be made conducive to the removal of the other. His son would attempt to fulfil the conditions which were understood to be required, and the impossibility of his breaking the one, and the care which he had taken to prepare himself for the other, afforded great reason to hope for success. He, the king, would be prepared to sanc-

tion the trial, with the goodwill of his brother sovereign, provided that the latter would consent to one condition,—namely, that if the young prince proved successful, the province which had been wrested from his country in the past war should be restored to her by way of dowry with the princess.

When the king heard this proposal he knit his brows, for kings do not like lightly to relinquish the prizes they have won in war, and, moreover, he felt doubtful as to the reception which his ministers would give to the proposal. But on second thoughts he remembered that his daughter was the heiress to his kingdom, which would be hers when he was dead and gone, and that, as her husband would naturally enjoy it with her, and as the young prince would also inherit the kingdom of his father, so that both would be united, it would matter very little to which country the province in question then belonged. Besides, anything in the world was better than having nothing but a black rabbit for your daughter; and to get back his beloved Cassandra would be worth any province in his kingdom twice over. So he answered the great lord civilly and kindly, told him that he thought his brother king's proposal fair and reasonable, and promised to bring it before the council of ministers the next day. Accordingly he did so, upon which all the ministers looked as wise as they possibly could; but as there were two or three of them who always really decided all the questions which came before them, and as these two or three agreed with their king, it was very soon settled that the young prince should be allowed to come and make the trial upon the terms proposed by his royal father.

So the great lord went back to his own country, and, in a little while after, the young prince set out at the head of a goodly train of followers, and in due time arrived at the court, where he was anxiously expected. All marvelled as he entered the hall, supported on either side by two noblemen of his father's court.

So sweet and yet sad was the expression of his sightless face, so noble his features, so majestic and yet graceful his appearance, that the king and queen were much taken with him at once, and the courtiers whispered to each other that this was indeed the very best of all the royal persons who had visited their court upon this errand, and the most fit and proper to be the husband of their king's daughter. The poor little trembling black rabbit was placed upon the sofa, upon which the young prince sat down by her side, and respectfully kissed the paw which was guided to his mouth. Then slowly rising from his seat and grasping the crystal goblet in his hand, full to the brim with the hot mulligatawny soup, he raised his sightless orbs to heaven, and, with one sigh of mingled hope and fear, drained the cup to the dregs and threw it over his left shoulder without once pausing to take breath. Oh, what a blessed, happy change! Nobody could see exactly how or when it happened, although all were eagerly watching; but before you could have turned your head, the black rabbit had disappeared, and Cassandra, a lovely girl of eighteen, stood before the assembled company.

The queen rushed frantically into her daughter's arms, whilst the nine maids of honour, uncertain how to follow her example and feeling it necessary to rush somewhere, rushed into the arms of the nine pages

without a moment's delay, and so infectious was the example, that Lord Dignity was seized upon and violently embraced in the same manner by the excellent old Aunt Sally. These first ecstasies over, they all turned to the young prince, and overwhelmed him with gratitude in so tangible a form that he was nearly smothered. There was indeed some cause for rejoicing. The restored princess was so perfectly beautiful, that I shall not attempt to describe her, because any description of mine would fall far short of the reality. The delight of the king and queen knew no bounds, and the only drawback was the unhappy blindness of the young prince, who was unable to see the beauty which he had been the fortunate means of restoring to the eyes of others.

But the good luck of the day was not to be clouded thus, and who should be the kind fairy upon this occasion but Aunt Sally. She suddenly remembered that her own particular doctor, who had accompanied her from India, was famous for curing diseases of the eye, and he was instantly summoned to the royal presence. He was a little, wizened, shrivelled up old man, very swarthy of complexion, and of any age you like to guess from 70 up to 150, although the natives firmly believed him to be fully the latter age, and no one remembered him anything else except just as he then appeared. After examining the young prince very carefully, he drew from his bag a small bottle of lotion and a squirt. Desiring the prince to be seated, he began deliberately to squirt the liquid into his eyes, first one, and then the other, pronouncing at the same time certain mysterious words which nobody had ever heard before and nobody understood.

Presently the prince cried out sharply, "Oh, how delightful! oh, what comfort!" Still the old man squirted on, and after a few seconds the prince again shouted, "Oh, father! oh, mother! I see! I see!" and sprang wildly from his chair. However, at the earnest bidding of the old man, he resumed his seat, and after a little more squirting he was able to see perfectly. The old doctor would not let him make much use of his eyes that day, but gave him a dark red ointment, with which he was to anoint them at night, and told him that in a day or two he would see as well as ever. And so indeed it proved, although he so far disobeyed the orders of the old Indian as to make use of his eyes to take a long fond look at the Princess Cassandra, whom he tenderly embraced, whilst they exchanged mutual congratulations.

The good news was immediately sent off to the prince's father and mother, and it was not long before arrangements were made for a grand meeting between the two courts, which was to take place at a country house belonging to a great nobleman of the country, which was situated very near the boundary of the two kingdoms, in the midst of a large, wild forest, out of which a gloriously beautiful park had been formed. Here it was that the two kings met, each with a large train of followers. The double misfortune which had befallen them, resulting in a double happiness, made the ancient enemies once more firm friends and true allies. Each warmly greeted the other, and the two queens embraced tenderly. There appeared to be the promise of unclouded tranquillity for the future, and the lovely scenery which surrounded the party added an additional pleasure to the universal joy. Romantic

glades, studded with magnificent oak-trees, were perceptible on every side, every walk was surrounded by masses of the rarest and most beautiful ferns, wild flowers abounded in luxuriant fragrance, and the chief beauties of nature seemed indeed to have been dealt out with a lavish hand upon that favoured spot.

In a splendid banqueting-room, opening out upon a well-kept lawn, from which you stepped at once into the free, wild forest, the party assembled together, in order that the formal betrothal of the prince and princess might take place. The prince received the sweet Cassandra from her parents, and, gently taking her hand, vowed to devote the rest of his life to her happiness, which would indeed be his own. She, raising her lovely eyes to his manly face, answered his tender expressions with the soft modesty of maidenhood, and, with rich blushes mantling upon her cheeks, promised to be a true wife to so noble and worthy a spouse.

The ceremony was almost complete—all was mirth and happiness. The sky was as cloudless as the destiny of the lovers appeared to be, and hope, joy, and love were in every heart, when the inner door of the room was suddenly thrown open, and there entered no less a personage than the terrible Aunt Martha. "Ho! ho!" she exclaimed, in her usual tones. "Ho! ho! more merriment and merry-making, eh? No bidding at all for the old aunt this time. Have you all forgotten Aunt Martha, good people? She hasn't forgotten *you* though, I can tell you. Since you've quite done with the christening gift, what think ye of a wedding present to-day?"

At these words of dire foreboding, the queen fell

flat on the floor in a dead faint. The nine maids of honour dutifully did the same, and were only brought to consciousness by the nine pages pouring nine glasses of sparkling moselle down their respective throats, without a moment's hesitation. The two kings stepped forward in horror, and a low groan of dismay passed through the surrounding throng of courtiers. The only person who showed herself at all equal to the occasion was Aunt Sally, who strode boldly forward and faced the old witch where she stood.

"Who are *you?*" she cried in her loudest tones; "who are *you*, to come here and annoy your own relations in this way? Why, you wicked old creature, you are a disgrace to the family! Off with you, witch! you have done enough mischief already."

But the other turned round upon her with a malignant glare.

"Furious and stout woman," she slowly answered, "you tempt your own fate. It is fortunate for you that your age and ugliness forbid my changing you into a snake, which I should otherwise do without delay. As it is, I command you to remain standing exactly where you are, until I have dealt with this dainty great-niece and great-nephew of ours in a way which you shall have the pleasure of beholding."

As she spoke she made certain strange passes, and uttered a terrible word, which no one present could either spell, pronounce, or understand. The effect was, however, that Aunt Sally found herself quite unable to move hand or foot, and had only time to exclaim, "Oh nephew, nephew! Good fairies, help us! I'm done for!" before she found herself unable to speak.

Then with a grim, cruel smile upon her face, Aunt Martha hobbled up close to the trembling lovers in the centre of the room.

"What, wed without Aunty's blessing?" she exclaimed in her usual croaking voice. "Pretty pets! that will never do! but you shall be wedded, little dears, don't be afraid; wedded indeed shall ye be if so it please your good parents. But listen to me, little treasures, Aunt Martha's present shall be given first." And, drawing herself up to her full height and waving her crutch in the air, she thus continued: "When I strike my crutch upon the ground for the tenth time, you, sweet Princess, shall become a frog, and you, Prince, a water-snake, and you must eat your Princess if you can, for that is the only way in which you shall ever be united."

As she pronounced these awful words, a yell of anguish burst from the whole court, and the poor princess fell fainting upon the breast of her promised spouse. He, with proud anger flashing from his eyes, but with agony in his heart, clasped his Cassandra closely to him, and cast his eyes upwards, as if to seek aid in his gallant defiance to so undeserved a fate. But the old witch struck her crutch fiercely upon the marble pavement.

"One!" she said; "pretty dears, how happy they look! Two! why a black rabbit was a nicer thing to be than a frog! Three! ho, ho! the snake holds his little frog tight, but she shall have a fair start from him presently. Four! you'll remember Aunt Martha next time, won't you, good people? Five! oh what a merry party we all are to-day! Laugh and sing, laugh and sing, my children! Six! make the most of your time,

my pets, for Fate is creeping on. Seven! what a thing it is to have kind relations! Eight! how does dear good Aunt Sally like it, and what is the good of her Indian doctor *now?* Nine! very near the end, my precious little darlings, and"—the words were still on her lips and the sound of the *ninth* stroke still rang upon the marble floor, when—

"Hold!" exclaimed a clear, sweet voice from the door which opened on to the lawn, and the old witch stopped as if suddenly paralysed, whilst all eyes were immediately turned in the direction of the voice.

There, in the entrance, stood a beautiful young lady, clad in a lovely robe of green and gold, with a crown of fern and oak leaves intertwined upon her head. The little fern-owl which sat trustingly upon her shoulder, and the rabbits, tame as household dogs, which followed her, were hardly necessary to proclaim to the astonished assembly that they were in the presence of the Fern Fairy, the most powerful, as well as the most kind and friendly, of the whole race of the magic sisterhood.

"Who called the good Fairies to help them?" she said, with a sweet smile; "I am here to answer the call;" and she stepped forward into the room, while a deep and miserable groan burst forth from the old witch, who shrank cowering on the floor.

"My children," continued the Fern Fairy in her pleasant silvery voice, addressing the prince and princess, who stood rooted to the ground with astonishment at what was passing, "do not be afraid of the threatenings of this wretched creature; she is powerless here, and woe betide her that ever she attempted to exercise her evil spells in the neighbourhood of the

free wild forest where the Fern Fairy is omnipotent! None of the evil with which she has dared to menace you shall ever come to pass, and you shall be free for ever from her vile, but henceforth impotent, malice. Love, hope, and peace shall be yours, for such are the gifts which I love to bestow upon the children of men. Prince, clasp your sweet princess to your breast! Henceforward it is yours to shelter her from the storms and tempests of life, and be misfortune for ever banished from your pure and innocent lives!"

Then she turned haughtily to the miserable Aunt Martha, who moaned and mumbled as she crouched upon the floor in abject terror.

"Wretched creature!" exclaimed the Fern Fairy in a voice like the sound of a silver trumpet, sharp and yet melodious, "not only shall the intended victims of your malice escape you, but the vengeance due to your many crimes shall overtake you at last. A worse doom than that which your cruelty would have inflicted upon these innocent people shall now be yours. Be changed, reptile as you are in heart, into a reptile in body as well. Become instantly a yellow toad, and, imbedded in a lump of chalk, remain darkly imprisoned in the white cliffs of Albion, there to repent of your detestable crimes!"

Scarcely were the words out of the Fairy's mouth, when, to their intense surprise, those who had their eyes fixed upon Aunt Martha, saw her, with one short, stifled scream, lose her former appearance,—in fact, for all they knew, disappear altogether,—whilst in her place remained nothing but a large lump of chalk, on the top of which the bystanders perceived a repulsive yellow toad sitting still for one second, and then

slowly sinking into the chalk, which immediately closed over it.

No power longer restrained Aunt Sally, and no sooner had she seen the enemy disappear than she rushed forward, and, whether from a desire to test the reality of what had happened or a wish to keep the old witch safe where she was, sat herself down upon the chalk, with an air of determination. Hardly had she done so when the chalk suddenly moved off and vanished from the sight of the bewildered people, whilst Aunt Sally came down upon the floor with a force which must have shaken her considerably, and which, even in the extraordinary circumstances which they were witnessing, had the effect of convulsing the whole party with laughter. Up scrambled the old lady, and, after a moment's pause, rushed forward with the evident intention of embracing the beneficent being who had interposed between her beloved relations and their threatened fate.

"Oh, you dear creature!" she shouted in her loudest tones. "Oh, you darling duck of a fairy! Let me thank you for your goodness. I *must* kiss you directly."

But the Fern Fairy smiled, and raising her hand gently aloft, Aunt Sally found herself unable to move a step further, whilst the fairy slowly but gracefully drew back through the glass door by which she had made her appearance.

"I want no thanks!" she said. "It is my pleasure to aid and succour mortals who have lived good lives, and who are persecuted by the powers of evil. Be all of you blest and happy, and, if you would thank and please me really, learn to take *your* pleasure as

I do mine, in helping others, and removing evil and misfortune from the paths of your fellow-creatures."

As she spoke, her voice was heard faintly and still more faintly, her form seemed to fade into the shadows of the oak-trees towards which she gently receded, and in another moment she, her fern-owl, and her rabbits were lost to view. Then immediately the two queens rushed into the two kings' arms; the prince and princess had been beforehand with them in the same process; and the nine maids of honour and the nine pages dutifully followed the royal example. In fact, I believe that they carried the matter somewhat further, and that the day of the wedding of the prince and princess witnessed also the wedding of these eighteen loyal and loving subjects.

Need I tell you any more of the story? From that day forth happiness and content reigned in the two kingdoms. The two kings and their queens lived as long as was good for them, and when in the course of time they died, the prince and princess became king and queen of both kingdoms, and, being supremely happy themselves, did all in their power to make their subjects the same. As to old Aunt Sally, she lived long, and became so much beloved by king, lords, and people, that they made constant figures of her of different materials, which were invariably exhibited at fairs and upon racecourses to the attraction of numerous and excited crowds. She left her vast wealth to the prince and princess, but as they had plenty of their own, they gave it all to the poor, which was as good a way of employing it as they could have discovered.

I hope, my dear children, that you will believe this

pretty story, because I think it *must* be true from the circumstance which I am now going to tell you. You remember the old witch was to be buried in the white cliffs of Albion? Well, Albion is England, as you all know, and some years ago, when they were making the South Eastern Railway, they had to tunnel through the white cliffs, and blow some of them up with gunpowder in order to do so. And there—right in the chalk as if it had been there for hundreds of years, quite fixed and bedded in but yet alive, they found a large yellow toad. No one knew how it got there, and it didn't gain much by being released from the chalk, for it was thought such a curiosity, that they popped it into a bottle of spirits of wine at once, corked it down tightly, and put it into a museum. I have no doubt that this toad must have been wicked old Aunt Martha, and, if anybody thinks differently, I only ask him to prove that it was somebody else; and until he does so I shall continue to believe that this was the place where the old witch was imprisoned, and rejoice to think that there is no chance of her ever getting out of that bottle!

There! I have told you all the story now. Go to bed and sleep soundly, my children; and if aught of evil be about you, there are the bright, blessed angels with their golden wings, more powerful than even the Fern Fairy, to shield you from harm and to hallow your baby dreams with their holy presence.

V.

THE PROVENDER BEES.

THE Bankshire roses were covering the old walls of Provender with gay festoons, cheering the dark ivy with their lively colour, and tempting the children to twine wreaths and garlands from the clustering flowers which hung down within easy reach of their little hands. The sun was lighting up the ivy and the roses with his genial warmth, and the honeysuckles were so pleased with it that they sent out their sweetest perfumes to greet the welcome rays, and filled the air with their soft, sweet, balmy presence. And the bees came down with a business-like hum, combining duty with pleasure as they buzzed from flower to flower, making the most of their time, and gathering the sweetest and choicest essence for the honey which they were going to make when they got safe back to their hives in the orchard behind the house.

There were several ways by which they could get to the orchard. They could fly round to the right, over the high white gates across the coach-road, skirting the end of the barn and the stable, and go to

the left over the greenhouse and on to the orchard beyond. Or they could mount up high from the honeysuckles and pass between the gables of the old house underneath the fine red fox which served as a weathercock, and so down on the other side again; or they could pass by the glass door of the drawing-room and over the wall of the kitchen-garden, and then take their flight across "my lady's rose-garden," where the standard roses blossomed and budded in all their beauty upon the grass-plot between the two walls which formed the boundary between the kitchen-garden on the one side and the croquet-ground on the other. Each of these was such an important place that it required a wall all to itself, and so there came to be the long narrow strips between the two walls, wide enough to form a pleasant walk through the roses which "my lady" loved so well, and amongst which I have often seen her walking, with her little open basket on her arm and scissors in her hand, cutting away the dead roses, and watching the opening buds of her favourite trees.

All these different ways were open to the honey-laden bees who flew homewards with their sweet burdens; and as bees are free and independent beings, some took one way and some another. There was one little bee, however, who had carefully extracted the sweet juice from the best honeysuckles she could find, and was so pleased with her success that she flew out, honey and all, on to the lawn, and then turned round to cross the kitchen-garden wall beyond the white door through which you passed to enter it from the lawn, and some way further than she need have flown if she had gone the nearest way. As she neared the kitchen-

wall, her load was heavy, and she flew but slowly: forward she went, however, and would soon have been far on her way home, but for an unforeseen hindrance.

Out of a hole in the top of the wall wasps were buzzing to and fro; the mortar had become loose, for the wall was very old, and little by little the hole had got larger, until it had come to such a size half-way down the wall that there was plenty of room for a nest. So the wasps thought, and a nest they had built sure enough, with one entrance from the top, and all the other holes carefully fastened up. There they were as snug as need be, and for more than one summer they had built their nest and reared their young, and had never been molested by the cruel hand of man.

So on this lovely summer's day, as the honest bee was on her way home, the wasps were playing about at the entrance to their nest, as merry as a schoolboy on a half-holiday. The yellow robbers soon saw the bee, and guessed whence she came and whither she was going. She, poor innocent insect, suspecting no evil, rose to fly over the wall, when, to her horror and surprise, she found herself surrounded by the gay villains who had watched her approach from the lawn. She was alone, weary, and undefended, too good an opportunity to be missed, and the wasps flew up at once and prevented her passage.

"Honey! honey!" they cried; "pay us the turnpike-money in honey; there is no passage over the wasps' nest without paying;" and they pressed close upon the poor insect with loud and angry clamour.

What could she do? Flight and resistance were alike impossible, and she could only buzz out her remonstrances at being thus interrupted in her peaceful

homeward journey. But remonstrances were vain. Determined to possess themselves of her honey, the eager thieves pressed around until she was forced to show her sting in self-defence; that, alas! was the signal for her ruin, for the angry crowd at once attacked her on all sides. Their savage onslaught soon left the poor bee lifeless on the top of the wall, whilst every atom of the sweet essence she had extracted from the honeysuckles was greedily seized and devoured by her cruel murderers.

Poor little bee! her life had been passed in honest, quiet, steady labour to provide for herself and her family, and she deserved a better fate. However, it often happens in this wicked world that one person works and another reaps the profit, and so that day's labour of our poor bee was all for the benefit of the robber wasps, her busy toil was over for ever, and her fellow-workers would see her among them no more. Meanwhile the other bees had finished their day's work, and began as usual to gather round the mouth of the hive, and carry on their ordinary buzz of conversation before retiring for the night. Now, although you may think it curious, bees know each other just as well as birds and beasts, or men and women, and the absence of the murdered bee was before long discovered. Anxious inquiries were made after her, and all kinds of guesses hazarded as to what could have become of her. Some thought that she must have got shut inside the house by accident, and would probably be found crawling on the drawing-room window pane next morning when the housemaids opened the windows. Some suggested that perhaps the tomtits had got her, and some had legends of

kittens and puppies that had knocked bees down with their paws for fun, and hinted that this might have been the fate of their missing friend.

Again, some thought that she might have crept in to sleep in one of the old swallows' nests under the roof, and one or two were found ill-natured enough to insinuate that she had eaten too much honey and was probably sleeping it off in the ivy. Nobody believed *this*, however, as she was a remarkably well-behaved bee and her character above suspicion, and so they all went to bed and thought no more of the matter. But next morning, when the sun shone out brightly upon the lawn, and the dewdrops sparkled like diamonds in the early light, the busy little inhabitants of the hive, before setting forth upon their usual errand of honey-making, inquired again among each other as to the absence of their missing sister.

Whilst they were buzzing about the mouth of their home in eager conversation, a louder and different kind of buzz from that of an ordinary bee was heard, and a venerable humble-bee was seen approaching the hive in a state of evident agitation. The visit of this respectable person would, under ordinary circumstances, have been considered in the light of an intrusion by the working-bees of the hive, but, under the peculiar excitement of the moment, he was welcomed by a general buzz of approval, as the probable bearer of tidings; and a couple of lazy drones who insulted the ancient gentleman as he buzzed up to the door, were at once waxed up in an old honeycomb and effectually silenced. Soon, too soon, was the news brought by the old humble-bee disclosed to the friends and relatives of the absent one. He had been out that

morning before his usual time, and was taking an early buzz along the garden walk, when he had come upon the body of the murdered bee, and, whilst he gazed upon her with feelings of regret and indignation, had heard the whole tale of her unhappy fate from a respectable and trustworthy spider who resided in the immediate neighbourhood.

Impressed with the importance of the event, and being moreover a bit of a gossip, and rather proud of being the first to tell to anybody some particular bit of news, the fussy old gentleman had no sooner heard the story than he made the best of his way to the hive, and disclosed to its occupiers the fate of their unhappy sister. No sooner had the communication been made, than rage and sorrow filled every breast. Honey-making was postponed at once, the greatest excitement pervaded the whole hive, and nothing was to be heard save one simultaneous and universal buzz of patriotic fury. This, indeed, was as bad as a declaration of war on the part of the wasps. Their enmity to quiet, honest, industrious bees was indeed no secret; they envied them their prosperity, whilst they despised those honourable exertions by which it was reached. They never lost the opportunity of joking and sneering at the honest labourers, and now they had carried matters to such a pass that no bee would be safe alone, unless measures were immediately taken to punish and subdue these lawless thieves.

Filled with such thoughts, and inspired by warlike ardour, the little insects buzzed more and more furiously around their honied home, and, to the number of several hundreds, prepared to advance,

under the guidance of the old humble-bee, against their treacherous foes. The queen bee put herself at their head, and after a turn or two round the orchard by way of demonstration they passed round by the way of the stables and the coach-road, and came out upon the lawn close by the dining-room windows. Thence they proceeded to advance upon the lawn in front of the house, spreading themselves right and left between the flower-beds in a manner so threatening and a sound so loud that Towley, the little black terrier, lost his temper frightfully, and gave vent to a series of discordant howls; whilst Jessie, the soft long-haired Pomeranian dog, put her tail between her legs and fairly took to her heels to escape the buzzing armament.

But as the leading bees skimmed over the lawn in this manner, they became aware of the presence of a number of friendly sand-bees, flying up continually from the ground and mingling in the ranks of the advancing army, and, after some little interchange of words, the troops were halted in order that the views and opinions of this kindred tribe might be ascertained. These were soon stated in a clear and convincing manner by the principal sand-bees of the place, and caused some considerable doubt as to the wisdom of the course which the hive-bees had been about to pursue in advancing at once upon the wasps' fortress.

This, said the sand-bees, was a place of great natural strength; and as the entrance was so narrow that only one bee at a time could possibly creep through it, the defenders of the nest would fight at immense advantage, and be able to destroy their assailants one by one as they entered. Moreover,

the wasps had doubtless already seen the advance of the bee army across the lawn, and would therefore be prepared and on their guard. True it was that the high courage and steadiness of the warrior bees might, under every disadvantage, prevail, and the stronghold be taken, but it would only be accomplished at the cost of many valuable lives, and these ought not to be sacrificed until all other means had been exhausted.

The queen bee listened with attention to the words of wisdom which the sand-bees thus buzzed in her ear, and after taking some little time for thought, commanded her army to retire for the present to the honeysuckles and content themselves with laying up stores of the sweet juice, whilst she held council with some of her leading chiefs and the wisest sand-bees. Accordingly the army retreated, though not without sundry hums of discontent; whilst the queen, settling upon a charming bunch of mignonette, called the wise ones around her, and asked their advice under existing circumstances. As is usual upon such occasions, advice of the most contradictory nature was given. One of the bravest of the hive-bees, after buzzing furiously round the mignonette, as if too much excited to settle, declared that it would be fatal to the credit and reputation of the bee nation if they longer delayed their advance upon the citadel of the wasps. Glory and revenge alike urged them forward, and these should at all risks be followed.

Another suggested a different course; he thought that a strong body of bees should fly round to all the fruit trees and kill the straggling wasps which were always to be found half-buried in the ripest peaches, nectarines, and golden-drop plums: this experiment, daily repeated, would so thin the ranks of the enemy

that in a few days it would be easy to capture his fortress and destroy the survivors. There was something to recommend this proposal, to which the queen listened graciously, being perfectly determined that in some way or other revenge should be had. Indeed, so resolved was she upon this point, that when a lazy young bee, three parts a drone, spoke of the trouble and misery of war, and suggested that the offence of the wasps should be overlooked, she flew into a tremendous passion, stung him severely on the back, and directed him to be immediately thrown into the large green bottle of sweet bait which the gardener had fastened against the wall, where he perished miserably among drowning wasps and blue-bottles.

When various pieces of advice had been given from several quarters, a venerable sand-bee craved permission to state to the queen his views of the case, and on leave being given, he proceeded to develop his ideas.

"Why," said he, "should the royal queen bee employ her own forces in this undertaking, and needlessly expose the lives of her subjects without any necessity? It is perfectly well known to all students of history that this world of ours is inhabited by bees, but not only by bees. Other creatures have been allowed to exist therein, all of whom can in some manner or another be made useful to that great bee nation for whose use and advantage, in the first instance, the world was undoubtedly created. Amongst other inhabitants of the world Man has been allowed to take his place. Nor must we fall into the common error of supposing this animal to exist merely for the purpose of providing hives for our noble people.

That, no doubt, is the main object of his existence, but he is so constituted as to be also of service to us in other ways. One of his guiding principles is a detestation of wasps. In some instances—especially among the females of his race—this detestation amounts almost to positive terror, and I have been myself the witness of strange scenes when hovering about outside the dining-room window. I have seen young ladies shudder when a wasp approached the breakfast table and buzzed round the jam or honey, and I have even known them jump up and run from the table in sheer fright of the rude insect. Now the result of all this feeling has been the destruction of wasps' nests, wherever they have been found, by the bolder portion of the human race. They have various means of accomplishing this, into which I need not now enter. Suffice it to give my opinion that if the exact spot in which our enemies have built their nest could be pointed out to the dwellers in Provender, there is little doubt that they would without delay proceed to do our bidding and to destroy the foe."

When the old sand-bee had thus spoken, a general hum of approbation greeted his words. All saw at once that if men or boys could be induced to destroy the wasps' nest, danger to the bee army would be avoided, whilst their revenge upon their enemies would be at once terrible and complete. The chief difficulty, however, lay in the means of communicating the situation of the nest to the Provender people. Mere men and women, boys and girls, were too stupid to understand the meaning of intelligence conveyed to them by an honest buzz, and to attract the attention

of any one of them by a sting might not only, after all, fail of accomplishing the desired result, but would probably be followed by the immediate and painful death of the bee who should undertake the attempt. What, then, was to be done?

Here, again, opinions were divided as to the best course to be pursued. One young and enthusiastic bee gave it as his opinion that if a considerable number of the inmates of the hive should suddenly and without a moment's notice settle upon Towley, the little spoilt pet of a black terrier who lived in the house, and sting him severely, his cries would be sure to attract the attention of the people of the house, who would probably lay the mischief to the door of the wasps, and search with double care for their nests. This plan, however, had its disadvantages; and as Towley was much beloved by the ladies of the family, it was thought possible that insult and injury to the favourite might result in the destruction or banishment from the place of the hives, so that the bees might in this way be only bringing misfortune upon themselves.

Then it was suggested that as many as fifty chosen bees should boldly enter the drawing-room and crawl together upon the window panes from morn till eve until the people should note and wonder at their presence; that then they should fly off in a body, and hover about near the wasps' nest until those who gazed at them from the windows should come out and discover the truth. But against this it was objected that the service was one of danger, inasmuch as boys and housemaids were sometimes apt to kill bees as well as wasps when they saw them crawling up and down the window; and to run the risk of being crushed by a

book or flipped to death by a forefinger was not a service to be demanded of a respectable bee. Moreover it might, in the first place, be hours before they attracted attention at all; and when they did so, it was as likely as not that some kind person would throw up the window to let them out, and take no more notice of them afterwards. So this idea was given up at once, and so was the plan of sending a clever earwig to whisper the state of the case in the ear of the first person he could get at. This seemed plausible enough when first mentioned, but when they came to remember how exceedingly probable it was that the intentions of the earwig might be mistaken, and the discovery of his presence lead to his immediate death, the bees at once saw that the thing was out of the question.

So they buzzed and hummed and thought and wondered, and for a long time never seemed a bit nearer the way out of their difficulties. At length a venerable bee, famous in the annals of beedom for having stung two schoolboys and slaughtered a blue-bottle in single combat, threw up his head in delight and exclaimed, "I have it! Let's swarm!"

The idea instantly struck everyone as excellent; a swarm of bees was sure to attract all the people in the house; the bees had only to show themselves prominently before the windows to ensure being observed by everyone—then their course was clear. They would fly up and down for a little while opposite the house, and when attention was fully fixed on them, they would alight on the wall so near the wasps' nest that the latter was sure to be discovered. The project was no sooner decided upon than executed. The

humming and the buzzing of the bees grew louder and louder, and presently the whole number of them rose gradually higher and higher in the air, making a noise which caused Jesse, the Pomeranian dog, to start from her basking place on the lawn and bark vehemently; whilst Towley, with a sudden snarl of wonder, ran with his tail between his legs and hid behind one of the round, trimly cut bushes which grew one on each side of the front door. Up rose the bees in their crowded flight, and slowly waved to and fro before the front windows, coming close up to the house, and even now and then making as though they would dart bodily into the window.

They were not long in attracting the attention for which they had been so anxious. John Dines, the butler,—who had lived forty years in the family without growing a day older, and seemed quite to belong to the place as much as the old walnut-tree in the orchard or the weather-cock fox on the top of the house,—came hurrying to the door in a mighty fuss; whilst at the same moment stout Richard Wood, well known as the stoutest coachman that ever sat upon a box, came round the stable-yard corner in his shirt-sleeves, and left washing the carriage to know what the loud humming could mean. Such a prodigious swarm of bees had never been seen, and the whole household were before long assembled at the doors and windows to see what could be the matter. This was just what the bees had wanted, and as soon as they perceived that everybody was looking at them with the greatest interest, they collected more closely together, made one feint of settling upon Dines's head, which made him cough loudly with trepidation, and

hastily shut the hall-door, and then moved in a dense mass across the lawn in the direction of the wasps' nest.

The eyes of all the people were fixed upon the bees as they swayed slowly to and fro, just above the fortress of their enemies, and then suddenly swooped down and settled upon the branch of a neighbouring tree after the latest and most approved method of swarming. Some of the men of the house at once followed, and I have no doubt that the swarm was properly hived before long. With that, however, this history has nothing to do. All I know is that the result was very much what the wise sand-bees had anticipated. The bees had swarmed so close to the wasps' nest, that it was next to impossible that the latter should not be discovered by the men, especially as the wasps, disturbed and alarmed by the noise and tumult so near their abode, kept flying in and out with increased activity, and thus made their presence known to the most careless observer.

Therefore, when the swarming excitement was over, the Provender people, little knowing that they were carrying out the exact plan of the wary bees, determined to take measures to destroy the wasps' nest. The gardener declared that he had always known there was a "wasps' nest somewhere handy," on account of the destruction of his plums and peaches, and the only wonder was that nobody had found it out before. However, they knew well enough that it was useless to attempt to take the nest in the daytime, and therefore determined to wait till night, and then make the assault in the manner best suited to accomplish their purpose. Accordingly they waited; and when the

night had set in calm and still and silent, Dines, the gardener, and old George from the farm, went out to their work, which they had determined to do well and thoroughly. The employment of a squib, the usual manner of taking a wasps' nest, was in this instance rendered difficult, if not impossible, by the circumstance of the nest being in a wall instead of, as is more usually the case, in a hole in the ground. Therefore, after some consultation, they resolved to procure a pot full of gas-tar, by pouring which down the hole at the top of the wall they would certainly destroy all the inmates of the nest. Accordingly, at the appointed hour they sallied forth to their work, and advanced quietly to the scene of action. All was calm and still. The bright moon shone peacefully over the lawn, lighting up the house, the wall, the trees and flowers, with calm and chastened light; no sound was to be heard save an occasional hoot from the owls in Provender and Sand-banks' woods, and the distant bay of a hound, who, after the fashion of hounds when awake at night, chose to take the moon for a personal enemy, and howled at her accordingly.

Stealthily the three men crept on to their deed of destruction, and only halted at the white garden gate close by the object of their expedition. Then, placing some wooden steps against the wall, Dines mounted upon them, and the gardener handed up the pot of gas-tar, while George stood grinning below, full of joyous excitement at the coming event. Slowly Dines began to pour, and in another moment the dark, fatal liquid trickled down into the home of the unhappy wasps, bearing its message of death and doom to the sleeping victims. A faint buzz was heard

inside, as if the sentinels had been surprised at their posts and were offering a fierce but, alas! an ineffectual resistance to the passage of the deadly fluid—a louder and louder buzz, as the tar penetrated into the further recesses of the nest, where were doubtless collected the main body of the insects, but no outpouring of their forces followed the sound. The slowly trickling stream did its deadly work but too well, and nothing could stand between the inmates of the nest and their impending fate.

For another moment all was silence, and then the stillness of the night was awakened by an appalling shriek, which proceeded from none other than the unfortunate George. Clapping his hands suddenly to the seat of his trousers he began to shout lustily and to dance and caper in the most distracted manner. Whether or no there had existed some unknown outlet to the wasps' nest I cannot say; probably it was so, and yet not many of the insects could have escaped unhurt, or Dines and the gardener would certainly have been attacked. Be that as it may, poor old George afterwards described his sensations in terms which showed whence his misfortunes had arisen. Whilst standing close to the wall and earnestly watching the operations of his companions, he had felt a kind of tickling on the legs and had thought little of it, until the two or three wasps, who had apparently fallen to the ground in a semi-stupified state and began to crawl dreamily up the legs of his trousers, had, with time and warmth, become more lively, and, having crawled a certain distance, commenced using their stings with good effect.

The howls of George aroused the house in a few

minutes, and one of the family who had just finished dinner came out to know what was the matter, and could hardly restrain his laughter at the sight of the capers which the worthy old man was cutting. The wasps, however, having been crushed and shaken out, he became somewhat happier, and much more so when he was invited into the dining-room and offered a glass of wine which, according to his own choice, was duly filled for him, half of port and half of sherry, and which operated like magic upon his nervous system. However, as a matter of fact, it was some days before George could sit down with any comfort to himself, and it was a long time before he forgot that night's work. His companions escaped without a sting, and altogether the undertaking had proved a complete success.

A deputation of sand-bees next day visited the hive to carry the news of the triumphant revenge which had overtaken the enemies of the bees. They were received with much cordiality, and at once recognized as friends and benefactors. From that moment the closest relations of friendship were established between the hive-bees and sand-bees, and have continued ever since. The wisdom and moderation of the sand-bees have always been of the greatest service to their powerful allies. When the latter were excited by the conduct of their neighbours at the cottage by Putt-wood, who, irritated at the loss of their comb, stung Mrs. Brenchley's dog to death and severely injured the good woman herself, the prudent advice of the sand-bees prevented any such display as might have resulted in civil war. Moreover, they taught the hive-bees to be gentle and forbearing

in their dealings with mortals, not to be unduly furious at the occasional slaughter of one of their number in mistake for a wasp, and generally to keep their stings to themselves. Owing to such wise counsels the hive-bees thrived and flourished, and to this very day the Bankshire roses bloom and the honeysuckles grow in all their sweet luxuriance on the walls of Provender, affording food and pleasure to myriads of the frugal hardworking insects who claim no higher distinction than to labour on cheerfully to the end of their existence under the title of the "Provender bees."

VI.

THE FERN FAIRY.

MANY children who have read the wonderful account of "Kate's Adventures" in "Stories for my Children" have been anxious to hear something more about the Fern Fairy, who showed such a friendly spirit towards Ned and Kate, and drove away the old witch who was so very much inclined to be troublesome. I have not the least objection to tell all that I know about her, which I learned at different times from the conversation of various rabbits which I overheard when I was a boy. One of my great pleasures was to take my single-barrelled gun and an amusing book out in the hot summer weather, and wander about in the woods and among the ferns, which covered many acres of the park of my old home. Here and there at different places, there were open spots in the fern where the rabbits had their warrens, and by stealing quietly along the narrow tracks which the deer had made, you could get quite close to the earths without being seen, and take a quiet shot at some of the many rabbits which you were sure to see

playing about in the sand or sitting at the mouth of the holes enjoying the sun.

It was my delight to choose some pleasant spot near these earths where I could sit and read my book, and now and then creep out for a shot. And on some of these occasions, when I did not care to shoot, or cared more to read, I could not help hearing what went on among the rabbits; and although it is not very polite or proper to listen to other people's private conversation, I have always been told that there is no harm in listening to what animals say to each other, and gathering from them all the information which you may be able to collect. So I always used to listen to what the rabbits said, and, by this means, I became acquainted with some of the history of the Fern Fairy.

All the rabbits seemed to love and speak well of her, and to own her as their lawful sovereign. To hear them speak of her wonderful doings you would have thought that she was certainly the most powerful queen that ever lived, and undoubtedly (except our own dear Queen Victoria) the most beloved by her subjects of any monarch who ever sat upon a throne. Her power seemed, in fact, to be unbounded, and the rabbits evidently believed that the park and the ferns and all the country round belonged to her. And, oh! what benefits she had showered upon her subjects! No wonder that they loved her so much. She it was who had founded the hospital for incurable rabbits: she had established the anti-ferret society, by which so many valuable lives had been saved; the principle of the society being, that upon the entrance of a ferret into the earth, the rabbits, instead of bolting out imme-

diately, which was strictly forbidden, all repaired at once to the narrowest hole, drawing lots who should go first, and then, sitting closely wedged together, with their backs to the enemy, presented a formidable barrier, so that he could never get beyond the first rabbit. The latter's back suffered terribly indeed from this arrangement, but he had the satisfaction of preserving his friends, and, if seriously injured, was always supported by their joint contributions for the rest of his natural life.

The Fern Fairy, moreover, had organized great rabbit games, which were generally held in the sand-pit, and which were attended by rabbits from every part of the civilized world. These annual meetings were immensely popular among all the burrowing tribe. The hardy black rabbit from Barracks' wood came down to vie with the pollard-climbing inhabitant of Bockhanger; the wild dweller in the chalk hills of Giddyhorn met the famous white rabbits of Evington; and the Park-wood rabbit, who nestled in the flags and scorned to burrow in the earth, drank the loving cup with the furry brethren of the honey-combed Boat-pond plantation. No wonder, then, that the queen who provided such pleasant sports and such happy meetings for her subjects, lived in their affections a royal idol indeed.

But, although the Fern Fairy was so much beloved and so powerful, she was not without her enemies. Everything which is good in this world of ours is hated and envied—hated because it is envied—by the spirit of evil; and because this queen of the Fern country was good and kind, and gentle and generous, those who were not gifted with such

like qualities looked upon her with great dislike. And, if the story be true which I overheard an old buck-rabbit telling to a number of the younger ones of his own kind on a warm summer's evening, more years ago than I like to reckon, there was at one time much trouble in that part of the world before the queen's authority was firmly and safely established. He was a very aged rabbit who told the story; one of his eyes was gone, and the other was dim; he had lost an ear; one fore-foot had been left behind in a trap; and the scars upon his back unmistakeably betokened the attack of a ferret at some former period of his life. But his voice was firm, the respect which was paid him by his audience remarkable, and he was evidently, as regarded the Fern Fairy, loyal to the backbone.

I cannot tell you the story in his own words; but as well as I could gather it from him, keeping very quiet and listening with the greatest attention, this is what I believe to be a true account of his tale.

Among the worst of the enemies whom the fame and goodness of the Fern Fairy had roused against her was Grindmash, the Osier King. This person was a dwarf of considerable power, but repulsive appearance; his head was large, though his body was small; his legs were crooked, and his arms long and lank; his face was of a sly and hideous aspect, with cheeks large and puffy, eyes set very far back in his head, large thick lips and ears, a bristling red beard, and thin straggling hair of the same colour. But it was not the personal defects or natural vices of the dwarf which rendered his enmity alarming, so much as the power which he had gradually acquired

by his spells and charms over a number of evil-minded creatures in the country round. To him other dwarfs rendered willing homage; at his command Will-o'-the-wisp showed his deceptive light and led weary travellers astray; birds of ill omen appeared at his call; all that was opposed to goodness and purity looked to him for aid, and it was even reported that at one time the famous witch of Brooke Hollow had sought his advice and counsel in some moment of difficulty.

The history of Grindmash was difficult to trace. Tradition said that he had been found, an abandoned infant, on the edge of the old moat at Quarrington Farm, and had been allowed the run of the place till his mischievous taste for setting fire to everything, and spoiling any property he could lay his hands on, had caused his banishment. This, however, must, if true, have occurred at a very remote period of time, and no one knew whence the little monster really came. His habits of life, however, were sufficiently notorious. An osier bed was his favourite haunt; and it was from the claim which he advanced to the ownership of all the osier beds in the country that he derived the title by which he best loved to be called, the Osier King.

I daresay that some people who will read this veracious history have at one time or other in their lives tried to beat through an osier bed in order to drive out the hares and partridges. If so, they will doubtless recollect how the thick sedge and grass hindered them from walking through the osiers, and how very often brambles caught them across just under the knee, and the osiers themselves, higher

than one's head, seemed as if they meant to prevent them from getting through, if they possibly could, and to shut out the fresh air in a manner perfectly stifling on a hot September's day, so that to keep their temper entirely was a difficult matter for the eager sportsmen, and next to impossible to the heavily-laden keepers.

Well, do you suppose all this was natural? Not a bit of it! it was all Grindmash. He it is who planted the brambles, who taught the osiers to be disagreeable, and who, from his inborn love of mischief, always did his best to make his kingdom as disagreeable as possible to everybody else. He loved to hide in the thickest part of an osier-bed, and spent much of his time in smoking and sleeping; nor even at such times was he entirely harmless, his tobacco was so coarse and bad that it poisoned the neighbourhood for yards around, and his snoring was so loud and unpleasant that no one could hear it without moving off as far and as fast as possible. His food, too, was not of an inviting character, toads and snakes being his favourite diet, excepting when he could vary it by a nauseous compound of rabbit-skins and oil, of which he was exceedingly fond.

Hence, indeed, is supposed to have partly arisen his deadly hostility to the Fern Fairy. Knowing her to be the ruler over so many rabbits, he had at one time fancied that he might be able the more easily to gratify his tastes if he could share the sovereignty of the Fern and make the fairy his queen. She, however, having nothing whatever in common with such a misshapen imp, snubbed him terribly upon his first attempt to broach the subject, and showed him clearly

enough that the thing was out of the question. From that moment love turned to hatred in the evil breast of Grindmash. Full of malignant rage against the Fern Fairy, he thought that he could safely vent it upon her unhappy subjects, and accordingly commenced a persecution of the race of rabbits which it required all the power of their queen to resist.

Wires, traps, ferrets, weasels, keepers, guns, terriers, nets—nothing, in short, which the ingenuity of man has ever invented for the destruction of rabbits, ever caused the hapless race more misery than the crafty anger of the cruel Grindmash. No rabbit was safe in any locality where the power of the Osier King was owned, and it unfortunately happened that such localities were numerous. One, especially, there was, the position of which gave their enemy considerable advantage in his attacks upon the furry tribe. The ground between the Heron Pond and the Boat Pond in Hatch Park was for the most part of a rushy, swampy nature; and although patches of fern grew here and there, and the subjects of the Fern Fairy had established various settlements there from time to time, yet Grindmash had always questioned her title to the property, and, for the sake of peace and comfort, she had let matters go on to such a pitch that his claim was by many people believed to be valid. On first assuming the hostile position which he ever afterwards maintained, Grindmash paid frequent visits to this land; and, as it lay between the two great tracts of fern wherein dwelt great numbers of the queen's rabbits, he was enabled to carry on his nefarious designs against them with greater facility. For years he continued this system, until at last things

went so far that it was actually stated in the *Sandpit Review*, a newspaper which circulated largely amongst the rabbit people, that in one month alone no less than seventeen rabbits had perished upon the land in question; and the business appeared so serious that a memorial, praying the Fern Fairy to interfere, was signed by a very large number of her subjects, and duly presented to her by the six oldest rabbits in the park. The queen received the petition of her people with her usual kindness, and at once assured them that the matter should receive her immediate attention. Accordingly, she sat down and wrote a polite note to Grindmash, which (after the usual manner of well-educated fairies of her class) was in verse, and ran as follows:—

"They tell to me, Sir Osier King
(And swear it an undoubted fact is),
That you my friends to ruin bring,
And cruel deeds against them practise.

"Rabbits have sworn it, tough and old
(In fact I've few more old or tougher),
And it is time you should be told
Such things as this I cannot suffer.

"I care not what at home you do,
There you are far from sight or hearing
But *here* I really beg that you
Will henceforth keep from interfering.

"'Tis long ago, by voting fair
Queen of this land was I elected;
And now, I plainly do declare
My subjects' lives must be respected.

"Frequent the Park whene'er you please,
You're very welcome, sir, to do it;
But if you play such pranks as these,
I certainly shall make you rue it."

When the fairy had written these lines in fairy ink upon a large dead leaf, she sent one of her fern owls to the Heron Pond, and told them to deliver it to some of the moorhen messengers to take down to Grindmash, who was at that time upon the disputed land. This they dutifully did, and two moorhens, "Paddle-diddle" and "Flapper," took the note, swam over the pond from their home in the long reeds, paddled across the bay, and, descending into a ditch which crossed the marshy ground beforementioned, soon reached the small pond called the "Heron-pond stew," over which hung a venerable tree, on the roots of which was squatted no less a person than the Osier King. When he saw the two moorhens approaching, he gave vent to a shriek of discordant laughter, and left off nibbling at a cold boiled water-snake, off which he had been making his breakfast.

"Briars and Brambles!" said he, "whom have we here? Water-birds, I trow. Well, my ducklings, who has tempted you to come within the clutches of the Osier King? Welcome are ye, little chickabiddies, if tender and not too fishy!" and he grinned at the moorhens a hungry grin, which made their feathers stand on end and their yellow beaks turn white with fear.

But, being honest birds and intent upon doing their duty, they waddled slowly up to the dwarf, and presented to him the leaf on which was written the message of the Fern Fairy. As soon as Grindmash had read it, he flew into a furious passion.

"*Her* park, *her* subjects indeed!" he shrieked out "the impudent, conceited hussy; this is *my* ground,

and a man may do as he likes with his own. Who made *her* queen over me? I'll teach her manners. I'll teach her to talk about *her* subjects." And in an instant he seized upon both the unfortunate moorhens, wrung Paddle-diddle's neck at once, and was about to do the same with Flapper, when it suddenly came into his head that, if he did so, he should have no means of sending his answer back to the Fern Fairy, as moorhens cannot travel with their necks broken, and none of his own subjects were at all likely to venture into the queen's country with such a message as he intended to send, well knowing what the penalty would probably be. So he contented himself with pulling out Flapper's tail and clipping his wings, in spite of all his prayers and entreaties, and then, sitting down again, wrote his answer to the Fern Fairy upon a dried piece of bark. It was couched in the following terms:—

"You haughty Fairy of the Fern,
Insulting beyond measure,
Your message and yourself I spurn,
And still pursue my pleasure.

"I care not in the least for thee,
And, as it suits my habits,
I hold myself entirely free
To kill the passing rabbits.

"*Your* subjects are they, and you say
You'll certainly resent it?
Well then, unless they keep away,
I'll make the fools repent it.

"To give your arrogance a check,
And curb your haughty minions,
I've wrung one ugly moorhen's neck,
And clipt the other's pinions:

"And thus I to their mistress sing,
(That queen of grace and virtue!)
If she attack the Osier King,
He's got a rod for *her* too!"

When Grindmash had with some difficulty composed these lines, he fastened the piece of bark upon the moorhen's back, and had him carried up to the pond by two water-rats, who frightened the poor bird dreadfully all the while, by pretending to make snaps at his head and throat. However, they were obliged to see him safely into the pond, over which he swam as well as he could, and in due time the reply to her note was delivered to the Fern Fairy. You may imagine her rage and indignation. To be insulted in the heart of her own kingdom, her messenger slaughtered, and her authority utterly set at nought! This would never do, and measures must certainly be taken without delay. She well knew, however, that Grindmash had probably secured friends and allies before he had ventured to treat her with such disrespect, and she therefore determined to proceed with caution, so that her rights might be vindicated and her power established with as little trouble and loss as possible.

She accordingly dispatched a fern owl to the Boat Pond mermaid, an old and dear friend of hers, who ruled with undisputed authority over the Boat Pond, the upper and lower Red ponds and the Island Pond, and begged her to assist in blockading the intruder Grindmash upon the south and west of the Heron Pond stew, in which direction lay the mermaid's watery territory. She then summoned the brown owls of Barracks' wood, well known as the largest and strongest of their kind, and directed them to guard

with the greatest care the country from the Barracks wood corner of the Heron Pond down to the Red ponds, including the large oak and the rabbits' earth beneath it, half-way between the two. Thus she had a watch upon Grindmash south, west, and east, the Heron Pond being on the latter side of the swamp, and forming a barrier over which he would not be likely to attempt a passage. On the north side the fern ran close down to the marshy swamps for some little distance from the corner of the Heron Pond, and then there was a green spot, on which was a cottage, and beyond that, more rushes and swamp, the site for the cottage having evidently been chosen by some one who thought damp, fogs, ditches, and agues the best things in the world for people who have to live in cottages. On this side the Fern Fairy directed a close and constant watch to be kept by her fern owls, so that nothing might pass to or from Grindmash without her being immediately informed.

Meanwhile, every rabbit was expressly forbidden to pass the line marked out by the queen, under penalty of being immediately roasted and stuffed, the thought of which was so terrible that not one attempted to disobey. More than this, the fairy sent four very disagreeable dreams, which she had caught very young and trained to obey her, and ordered them to flit invisibly through the air, and visit Grindmash whenever he closed his eyes to sleep, as long as he stayed where he was. The little villain was likely, therefore, to have no peace, especially as the dreams were really most unpleasant: one making him believe he was just going to be hanged; one that a dog was after him from whom he could never *quite*

get away; the third, that his pipe was out and by no possible means could he re-light it; whilst the fourth always ended in his waking up with a dreadful stomach-ache, and feeling sure he had eaten too much toasted toad and hemlock sauce the night before.

So Grindmash, as you see, had no such easy time of it, and occasionally fancied that he had been somewhat foolish to quarrel with the Fern Fairy. However, his hopes rested upon foreign allies. Black Hogbine, the humpbacked dwarf of Beachborough mount, had consented to invade the park with a hundred stoats. Lame Lufton, the Coombe Rough water-sprite, had promised to join Goby Guffins, the Bircholt Goblin, and to worry the Bircholt side of the park fern with all the vermin they could get together; whilst Deaf Cornell, the well-intentioned and respectable keeper, had had false orders given him by which he was entirely deceived, to the effect that he was to kill two dozen rabbits daily until further instructions. So Grindmash hoped that he should be able to annoy the fairy and persecute her subjects pretty effectually, whilst he remained in his usurped swamp and defied her authority.

For a few days all went on quietly enough. Grindmash ate, drank, smoked, and slept, and no one disturbed him. When water-snakes and toads got scarce, he knew he should have to bestir himself, but of that there appeared no immediate probability; and, but for the dreams, he would have done well enough. He felt sure that the fairy could have no power over him, or very little, so long as he was on marshy ground, and he daily hoped for the intervention of his friends. However, as days passed on and they came

not, he began to feel a little uneasy, and bethought himself of venturing out to see what had become of them. He moved slowly along the rushy ditch which led towards the Island Pond, and would have passed that way, when a loud quacking from sentinel ducks, placed there by the mermaid, warned him that he could not do so undiscovered. Then he moved up towards Barracks wood, when the terrible hoot of the brown owls smote upon his ear and drove him back to his rushy bed by the Heron-pond stew. Next day he went forth again, and quietly crept towards the north side of the swamp; here, however, his prospects were no better, for silently to and fro the fern owls were flitting, and the white tent of the royal fairy was shining on the bank in the distance. He was evidently surrounded with enemies, and it put him into such an exceedingly bad humour that he broke his best pipe in two at once, and kicked his favourite rats right and left with such force that they were never quite the same creatures again. He went back to his lair by the pond, called for some preserved toadstool lozenges, and sat down to think.

Evidently he was in a scrape, and did not know how to get out of it. First of all he began abusing his faithless friends. This he did in pretty strong terms, but it did no good at all, and he had better have left it alone. The fact was that the humpback of Beachborough had received a summons to attend a great witch and dwarf meeting in the ruins of Saltwood Castle, which made him entirely forget Grindmash and his affairs. Lame Lufton had thought better of it, and feared the power of the Fern Fairy; whilst Goby Guffins had looked in at Bircholt

Manor Farm on his way to the park, and finding the master of the house asleep in his arm-chair, with a jug of ale by his side, had tossed off the latter at a draught, which, as all who know the quality of Bircholt ale will allow, was a pretty good excuse for his forgetting all about the matter. Cornell, indeed, was true to what he believed to be his orders, and sallied forth daily, gun in hand, after the two dozen rabbits; but being somewhat deaf, and not a little slow, he made too much noise for the wary rabbits, and seldom obtained more than a quarter of the appointed number, so that his efforts inflicted no great loss upon the queen's numerous subjects.

After a few days, therefore, Grindmash, finding that nobody came to help him or to distract the fairy's attention, began to feel very uncomfortable. His supply of water-snakes and toads was exhausted, the few rats that were in the neighbourhood fought shy of him, and not even a stoat or a weasel found its way to his lair to cheer his drooping spirits. In vain did he try to get rid of his hunger by dozing, which amusement he varied by smoking his strongest and worst tobacco. All was of no avail, and he found himself reduced to a most unpleasant condition. A hundred times over he wished he had never come to the swamp, or insulted the Fern Fairy; he called himself a fool, an ass, and an idiot—and felt inclined to tear out his hair from sheer vexation. Remembering, however, that this would do him no good, and might hurt, he began to consider whether he could not make favourable terms with his enemy. So he persuaded an old hedgehog, who had a nest in a hole in the bank of the ditch at the end of the Heron-pond stew,

to take a letter to the Fern Fairy which he had written in his best handwriting.

"I'm tired of your swamps and your park;
No longer the climate agrees:
I only came here for a lark,
And will go just whenever you please.

"Your rabbits and owls are a bore,
Surrounding the whole of the place:
Come, let me be off, and no more
Shall you see my delectable face!"

Having sent the old hedgehog off on his errand, Grindmash awaited his return with some anxiety, and trembled with eagerness as he received from his messenger the following answer, written on the leaf of a water-lily :—

"Contemptible dwarf! since my lands you invade,
And slaughter my innocent bunnies,
You'll find that against you are forces arrayed
Who will teach you how fatal such fun is.

"No terms will I make with so wretched an elf,
My moorhen you've ventured to martyr,
So now, Mr. Grindmash, look out for yourself,
For you've caught (so to call it) a Tartar."

When Grindmash read these words, he trembled all over; then he kicked the hedgehog into the pond in a tremendous passion; then he rolled himself over in the mud three times, stood on his head, bellowed loudly with rage; and, having thus given vent to his ill-humour, sat down, lighted his pipe, and began to think what was best to be done.

Whilst he sat thus he fell fast asleep, and snored more loudly than any dwarf of his size has ever done before or since. How long he slept he never could

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tell, but he was awoke by a cold feeling about his legs, and, after sitting upright and rubbing his eyes, found, to his alarm and amazement, that he was sitting in the midst of a pool of water, which, moreover, was gradually getting larger and larger. For an instant he could not understand what had happened, and then it flashed across him all at once. The Fern Fairy must have let the water off from the Heron Pond! So she had, and down it was running through the embankment, filling the ditches and gradually flooding the swamp below.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! The water was rising all around him, not a dry spot was to be found; and if it was not deep enough to drown him, he could expect nothing less than a bad cold in his head for the rest of his life. He was already wet to the skin, and as miserable an object as you can well imagine. So first he jumped up and howled, then he howled again, and then he splashed off up one of the ditches towards the north side of the swamp, where it was joined by the fern. As he neared the edge of the swamp, he perceived no less a personage than the Fern Fairy herself, standing quietly upon the bank with a fern owl on her shoulder, and a neat riding whip in her hand. Grindmash made a hideous face at the sight of her, but, knowing that he was quite in her power, could do nothing but whimper and cry for mercy.

"Oh, queen fairy," he said, "I never meant any harm; I didn't wish to offend you; I'll never do it again; only please forgive me this once; I'll do anything you tell me; let me kiss your beautiful feet and be pardoned. Oh, *do* forgive me——"

"Silence, sir," replied the Fern Fairy, in a stern voice: "you have behaved in a shameful and abominable manner; and as I can do just what I please with you as soon as you stand upon real fern ground, it would serve you perfectly right if I changed you into a withered thorn-tree directly, and so left you to drag out your miserable existence, whilst the honest rabbits whom you have injured might make their burrows among your roots, and gnaw your bark for their daily amusement."

At these words the miserable Grindmash sent forth a fearful howl and began again to implore for mercy, when he was stopped by a wave of the hand from the Royal Fairy.

"You need not fear," said she; "cruel as you have been, I am not about to imitate your example; nor, indeed, whether as a tree or anything else, do I desire to have in my park such a misshapen lump of deformity. But punishment you shall undoubtedly have, to show you that such doings as yours cannot be permitted in this free and happy country."

She then raised her hand to her mouth and blew a small silver whistle, which was answered by about a score of rabbits, each armed with a large stinging nettle. Pointing to the wretched dwarf, who lay trembling upon the bank, restrained by the magic power of the fairy from moving hand or foot, she bade the rabbits lay on with a will, and, nothing loth, the little creatures belaboured Grindmash with their nettle-whips till he roared again. From what I could gather, my old friend the buck rabbit was one of those employed upon this occasion, in which case he must have lived to an enormously old age; but perhaps I

may have been mistaken, and it was some ancestor of his who took part in the flogging operation. Be that as it may, the punishment was pretty severe; and when Grindmash was allowed to rise, he was a piteous object indeed.

Then the Fern Fairy spoke to him again and said, "Your life is justly forfeit, in consequence of your many crimes against my innocent people, but it is my pleasure to show you mercy. It is, however, my sentence upon you that you be henceforth for ever banished from this park and fern, and that you be not allowed to occupy any land or show yourself in any spot within the world except in an osier-bed. Go, miserable villain, from my sight, and hide your vile carcase in the brambles and thick osiers, where you will be unable to do more than that small amount of mischief without which you would die of idleness."

With these bitter and insulting words the queen drove the still smarting dwarf from her presence, and he hurried as fast as he could to the first osier-bed, where he could lie down and doctor his wounds. From that time forward the park rabbits were safe from his persecution, and his hatred of the Fern Fairy could do her but little harm, although he never caught a rabbit in his own territory without trying to find out that it was related to one of the Fern Fairy's subjects, and, if so, killing it with more than ordinary pleasure.

The fairy, meanwhile, profited greatly by the banishment of the hateful dwarf. Having proved her power to be so much greater than his, she became more and more respected throughout the whole country. Gradually her kingdom extended further and further, until wherever fern grew and rabbits bur-

rowed, her sway was owned and her sovereignty acknowledged. Numerous have been her acts of kindness ever since her power was firmly established. Cruelty and oppression she abhors, whether exercised upon man or beast, but innocent, loving natures she looks upon with a kindly eye, and will always befriend such if they come in her way. So if you want to be helped by the dear Fern Fairy, be loving and innocent, kind and gentle to each other and to the animals which are about you. Ay, and you have a better reason than *this* to make you gentle and kind. We need not wonder and question whether there are fairies or not, whom it would be well to please by such means; we *know* there is one great and Holy Being, to please whom should be our first aim and object—we know that He loves His children to be tender-hearted and gentle, and that whatever of innocence and tenderness is in our hearts is there by *His* gift; and that if we cherish and foster His gifts, there is not one of them that will not bless us fifty-fold, making our lives *here* doubly happy, and fitting us by His blessing for the endless life hereafter.

VII.

THE BOY AND THE BIRDS.

THERE was once a boy who was amazingly fond of bird-nesting. I shall not tell you his surname, for fear some of his relations might read the story, and be hurt or offended with me for telling it. But his Christian name was Tommy, and a rare hand he was at finding a bird's-nest. He could climb like—what shall I say? —like "a brick," like "a house-a-fire," like "one o'clock," like "fun," or like anything else which people use as an example to express excellence in that which they are describing. No tree was too high, no bush too rough for him; no nest, even when built on the ground, could escape his keen eye, and it was a bad time for the poor birds when Master Tommy took his walks abroad on a fine spring morning.

Oh, how lovely are those spring mornings! There is a beautiful freshness about them, which seems to breathe new life into one's lungs; and if one is wise and active enough to get up early and enjoy them, one really seems to have got the start of the world

and its noise and worry, and to be enjoying an atmosphere more pure and quiet than one can expect when the sun has got so high in the heavens that everybody must, for very shame's sake, be up and about.

Well, Tommy was a good hand at early rising—he was young and healthy and strong, and didn't see the fun of lying in bed when the sun was up, and the air was fresh, and the birds were singing; but I am sorry to say that, though he liked to hear the singing of the birds, neither the sweetness of their songs, nor the fresh purity of the morning, softened his heart towards the little creatures. No, he was a "regular," or an "irregular boy," whichever you please to call it; he thought nests were built on purpose for boys to find and take; he considered eggs fair game, and even young birds, if it was convenient to carry them; and he took both the one and the other without the smallest feeling of hesitation or remorse. One day, to be sure, he *did* repent of his doings, but then that was when he slipped as he was coming down from a tree with four eggs in his hat and one in his mouth, and the latter, having been broken by the jar, turned out to be rotten. This was not very pleasant, but as soon as the bad taste was out of his mouth, his repentance was past, and he went on just the same as ever. It happened one day that Master Tommy rose even earlier than usual, determined to have a regular good long day of it. It was a holiday—Whit-Monday, I think—and Whitsuntide fell early that year, so that the large birds had still got some nests about, and the smaller birds were in the height of their nesting season. So Master Tommy sallied forth in high glee, and set to work in real good earnest. Oh, what fun he had!

The treasures he was in search of were to be found on every side: here, in the fork of a laurel-tree, was the nest of a grey-thrush, carefully lined with mud, which had got to be quite hard, dry, and comfortable for the young birds, of which it was full. Close by in a holly tree, was the hay-lined nest of the merry blackbird, on which the old hen was still sitting hard, whilst her mate cheered her with his lively song from the topmost branch of a fir-tree hard by. In that same fir a pair of wood-pigeons had placed the little, simple nest of dried twigs, upon which the hen bird had laid her two pure white eggs, and the birds were cooing to each other in pleasant thoughts of the little ones whom they hoped soon to bring into the bright world. The goldfinch had built its nest in the top branches of the arbutus-tree in the shrubbery. The soft nest of moss and wool, snugly fixed on the branch hanging over the carriage road, belonged to the chaffinch; whilst every boy or girl would recognize the home of dear little Jenny wren, in the round mossy ball which hung close against the oak fence, propped up by the ivy, and only to be entered by that one little tiny hole in the middle, into which, if you put but the tip of your finger, the jealous little bird would desert the nest for ever.

So many nests there were, and so delightful was the morning, that Tommy strayed on and on, out of the shrubberies, into the woods, further and further from home, more and more excited in his eager search, and gathering together so many eggs that he must have found them somewhat difficult to carry. From a thick holly-bush he heard a harsh, grating sound, which attracted his attention, and rushing hastily up to it, he

saw two old magpies fly out. He climbed up in a minute, and in spite of all their scolding and chattering, as they flew round and round him in mingled rage and distress, he made himself master of the six eggs which their nest of sticks contained in its curious lining of rags, wool, hay, and all kinds of odds and ends, and descended safely to the ground with his prize. Out flew the starling from a hole in an old elm, and in another moment Tommy had several pretty blue eggs out of the straw nest, the place of which the parent bird had betrayed by her flight; and the jackdaw also showed him the way to her home by tumbling out of an old pollard with noise enough to make him start and wonder what was coming.

Oh, it was a rare morning's work which the boy was making; and, without a thought of the distress he was causing to the poor birds, he went on and on until at last he had got so far away from home that he really didn't know at all where he was. Near to where he stood was a large pond, round the edges of which were wide-spreading beds of rushes and reeds, beyond which several moorhens were sailing about on the water, whose nests were doubtless hidden in the reeds. For the moorhen is a simple bird, and requires no more luxurious nest than reeds bent down and made smooth, upon which she deposits her eggs and rears her brood. Poor thing! she has enemies enough besides boys; for if she escapes the rats and snakes, and leads her brood safely into the water, the crafty pike is always on the look-out, and, failing a young duck, he never objects to a tender chick of a moorhen for breakfast.

Well, Tommy came from the wood to the edge of

the pond, and looked at it for a moment in silence. Then he remembered that he had heard his father say how good moorhens' eggs were, cold and hard-boiled, and how that they nearly equalled plovers' eggs. So he thought he should like to get some: however, he was rather tired, and fancied that a little rest might do him good; so before he tried what the rushes and reeds might produce, he sat down on the bank and began to count his treasures. Oh, what a quantity there were! Eggs, large and small, filled two great nests which he carried in his hands. I am afraid to say how many there were, and in fact I don't know, so it is no use guessing. Tommy would have told me, or somebody else from whom I might have learnt it, only, unfortunately for those who wish to know, he never finished counting, as you will presently hear.

Whilst he was busily counting, one, two, three, and had got to some number between twenty and thirty, he came to an egg which rather puzzled him. He *thought*, but wasn't sure, that he had taken it out of a hedge-sparrow's nest, but yet the egg seemed larger than a hedge-sparrow's egg, and he held it up to the light to make sure, if he could, what it was, and to what bird it belonged.

At that instant, to his intense surprise and fright, a voice from a neighbouring oak-tree exclaimed, in perfectly good English, but in a somewhat queer-sounding tone, "That's my egg! there's the robber! cuckoo!" and, looking round, Tommy perceived a cuckoo, evidently in a state of anger and excitement, sitting on a bough and looking at him.

Great, as you may imagine, was his astonishment, but greater still at the scene which immediately

followed. From the trees and bushes around a perfect army of birds fluttered forth. Blackbirds came chuckling out, thrushes flew whistling down, magpies chattered to the front, jays screamed around, and the chorus was swelled by a whole tribe of finches, tits, tree-creepers, and other smaller fry, whilst a cloud of starlings wheeled on high, a venerable owl peered from a hollow oak close by him, and a dozen or more of moorhens came waddling up from the pond, croaking hoarsely as they came. Scarcely had Tommy time to wonder what it all meant, when, with one consent, the birds fell upon him; his cap was torn off his head, his clothes were clawed in every direction, a magpie pecked off every one of the buttons of his boots, and he had the greatest difficulty in preserving his eyes from a dun crow who made a dead set at them. He defended himself bravely, but was completely overpowered by numbers, and soon found his strength begin to fail. The cuckoo, meanwhile, sat chuckling and "cuckooing" with delight on the oak-tree, watching the combat with great glee.

At last poor Tommy could stand it no longer, but roared out at the top of his voice, "Oh, birds, birds, please leave off pecking me! Oh dear, oh dear, did anyone ever hear of such a thing as this? I shall be pecked to death; I know I shall. Oh, *do* leave off—please do!" and I am sorry to say that he could no longer help crying at the unpleasant position he was in, and the sufferings occasioned by the merciless pecking of his feathered tormentors.

Just then a magnificent cock-pheasant stepped forth from a neighbouring bramble, and strutting up

towards the boy, uttered a crow which had the effect of causing the birds to stay their attack upon the unfortunate Tommy. The pheasant had on his most gorgeous plumage, and the dark purple ring round his neck showed him to be a bird of rank. Standing still at a short distance from the trembling boy, he thus addressed him :—

"Boy, be composed ; it is not our purpose to destroy you, though you have well deserved it by your cruel persecution of our race. Know, however, that the hour of vengeance for your birds'-nesting wickedness has at length arrived. You have unwittingly entered the birds' country. Here we allow no mortals. Peace, love, and harmony prevail among the feathered race, and men, women, and children cannot consequently be admitted amongst us except under certain conditions and upon rare occasions. But since you have come here uninvited, and have actually been taken as a robber plundering our homes and depriving us of our children, you will now be obliged to remain here as the slave of the birds, and meanwhile, suffering yourself, you will learn to repent of your cruelty to others."

At these words Tommy set up a miserable howl, for he felt only too sure that the pheasant was speaking the truth, and he was scarcely comforted when the noble bird added that he need not fear for his eyes, for that no bodily harm or serious injury would be done to him if he quietly submitted to the fate which he could not avoid. However, feeling that there was really no help for it, and that escape was impossible, he thought it best to yield, and, with some tears and sobs, informed the pheasant that he had made up his

mind to do so. Then all the birds set up a song of triumph, and the cuckoo, after flying three times round his head and flipping his nose with her tail, took up her egg and flew off to put it back in the nest of the hedge-sparrow, to whom she usually deputed the task of hatching and rearing her young, being herself too much of a fine lady to trouble herself with such domestic trifles. The other birds, however, had by no means done with Tommy. With laughter and sneers they now flew upon him, and, without hurting him in the least, pecked away every bit of his clothes with great determination. They then brought a vast quantity of feathers, belonging to all kinds of different birds, who had no further use for them, and, with some kind of gum or glue, fastened these all over the unfortunate boy's body, who thus found himself as nearly as possible a bird, only without the advantage of being able to fly. He felt terribly ridiculous, more especially when some of the birds, and particularly the magpie, "chaffed" him incessantly about his sad condition.

"Well, my bird-boy," said the impudent bird, "how do you feel now? Like a jackdaw in peacock's feathers, is it, or like a fish out of water, more likely? *You* take magpies' eggs, do you? oh, you villain!" and the bird gave him a sharp peck on the ear, which made it tingle again.

When he was quite plastered all over with feathers, he was driven by a guard of birds, principally blackbirds, thrushes, and starlings, with the trumpeter jays in close attendance, to give the alarm in the event of any outbreak on the part of the prisoner, to a leafy bed in the middle of the wood, which he was told was

to be his nest, and where he at once laid himself down to think over the events of the day.

No such rest, however, was allowed him, for he had not been there above ten minutes before he was aroused by a peck on the little toe of the left foot (which was peculiarly tender from a recent corn), from a grey thrush.

"Get up, slave," said he; "my mate tells me our children want food, I shall therefore sing to her whilst you go and look for some worms. No nonsense; be quick about it."

Tommy didn't much like being ordered about by a common thrush, such as he had shot with his cross-bow at home, and upon whose race he had always looked down as upon inferior beings, but there was no help for it, so he roused himself up and went to look for worms. Whilst he was grubbing about for these, which he found no very clean or pleasant employment, he was set upon by a whole tribe of tom-tits, who declared that boys always ate meat, and that he *must* have some bits of meat, which was their favourite food, to give them. In vain he vowed and protested he had none with him, but that they should all sit upon rounds of beef and eat their fill if they would only take him home. Nothing would appease them, they hustled and pecked and bullied him, and would give him no peace until they were driven away by an owl who declared that the boy-slave must go directly and catch her some mice. Poor Tommy was quite in despair, and hardly knew how he got through that day, although he well remembered for days afterwards the pecking he got on fingers and toes from the grey thrush and several of his friends, in consequence

of the very small supply of worms which he had been able to obtain.

At night he tumbled into his leafy couch, and slept as sound as circumstances would permit, but his feathers tickled him so, and felt so strange and funny, that he did not have half so good a night as usual. Very early in the morning he was awakened by half-a-dozen birds wanting his services for one thing or another, and on his humbly suggesting that he could not manage to do everything at once, wings were flapped in his face, pecks administered to him wherever the birds thought he would be most tender, and he was treated after a fashion which he really felt to be both cruel and unjust. He had nothing for it, however, but to submit, and did so with as good a grace as possible. In the course of the day he caught grubs, worms, and insects for some dozens of young feathered families; he broke off twigs and collected sticks for the nests of several magpies and jays; and watched over several pheasants' nests to protect them from enemies whilst the old bird took a short ramble for exercise. Night found him again nearly dead with fatigue, but by degrees his feathers annoyed him less, and he became quite accustomed to sleep in them.

One day, however, he got into a great row, and was terribly afraid of the consequences. The moorhens, who had aided in his capture, had, from their habits of life and the fact of their home being upon the water, received no great amount of service from the boy-slave. Irritated at this, and being rather silly birds, one of them actually claimed his aid in hatching her eggs. The boy begged to be excused, and pointed out the great difficulty he should labour under from

his utter inexperience of the duty which he was expected to discharge. The moorhen, however, obstinately insisted upon his making the attempt, and the natural result was that eggs and nest were squashed and Tommy found himself sitting with very damp feathers in the shallow part of the pond; upon this the waterbirds turned furiously upon him, accused him of gross negligence, if of nothing worse, ducked him soundly in the pond, stamped on his face with their flabby feet, and would have drowned him outright but for the intervention of an elderly drake who had seen the world, and knew that the boy had been asked to perform an impossibility.

It would be tedious if I were to relate to you the whole of Tommy's experiences during his captivity—nest-building and food-finding were among his principal duties, but there were many other services which he was expected to render, especially when nesting was over. He had to carry the invalid birds out for an airing; to watch the sick and aged birds whilst their companions were away; to warn the pheasants when the first of October came, so that they might avoid going out into countries dangerous and infested by sportsmen, and generally to look after the welfare and interest of the bird country. By this means he acquired during his slavery a considerable knowledge of the habits and manners of birds, of some of whom he got to be quite fond. Their songs were so sweet, and they were so friendly and pleasant with each other, the mates so true and tender, the parents so loving, the children so dutiful, that a wiser head than Tommy's might have thought it would be well if mankind would take a lesson from the feathered race.

Still, to be their slave was not entirely pleasant; and though Tommy had now no school and no lessons, I think he actually regretted both the one and the other occasionally! Time wore on, however; summer passed away, with its hot sun softened by the cool shadows of the wood which was the capital of the bird country; autumn came, and tinged with yellow hue the leaves of the trees, which, as the months waned, began to shrivel and curl up, and then droop and fall upon the ground beneath; already the frosty mornings heralded the approach of old Father Winter, and Tommy shivered in his leafy bed, and asked for and obtained more feathers and more leaves to cover him. And then, little by little, the frost and the cold gave way, and the sun began to have more power, and there were warm hours again in each day, and the soft south winds blew, and the sweet, bright spring days began to come once more.

And one day whilst Tommy was walking back to his bed after a hard day's work, he stepped upon the root of a tree and sprained his ankle. It was so bad that he could scarcely drag himself to his resting-place, and the pain was so great that he could get no sleep for several nights, and became quite ill. He felt very weak and low and miserable, when early one morning he heard a soft "coo" near him, and, looking round, he saw two beautiful wood-pigeons looking at him.

"Poor slave-boy," said one, "we have heard of your illness from some of our friends, and have come to help you."

So they flew down to Tommy and soothed him with their calm, sweet voices. They had obtained some wonderful cure for sprains and bruises from the

wise owl, who was the great bird-doctor; and when they had applied this, they fanned the poor boy to sleep with their wings, and watched him till he woke better and refreshed. Then the pigeons talked to Tommy, and he told them all his story.

During his time of slavery he had often thought over the past, and regretted his thoughtlessness and cruelty in robbing so many nests and destroying so many young families.

"Ah!" said he, "however hard I find my life here, after all, the birds have not made me undergo so much suffering as I have inflicted upon them but too often! If ever I am freed from this bondage, I will never do the like again!"

"Say you so?" said a voice near him at that moment, and, looking up, Tommy perceived the stately cock-pheasant standing close by. "These are good words indeed," he continued, "and I hope they come from your heart!"

"That they do," replied the boy; "I now know what it is to suffer, and what the birds must endure when robbed and deprived of their young. Besides, the kindness I have just received from these dear pigeons has touched my heart, and from henceforth I shall feel a love for birds which will make it certain that I can never treat them cruelly."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said the pheasant, "and it makes me the more ready to declare to you some good news. The great bird council has this day determined to allow you to go free. Remember, however, to keep to the good intentions which you have now formed, for by every egg you take out of a poor bird's nest you inflict a pang upon an innocent heart.

We poor birds do our best to cheer mankind in our different ways. I say nothing of my own tribe. We look as handsome as we can, and the reward we generally meet with is to be shot and roasted. But the singing birds are altogether different—you do not want *them* for eating, and surely their songs are worth a few cherries and currants. Do not think only of your own amusement in future, but consider the feelings of others, and spare the nests of these birds, who have been sent into the world for a good purpose, and who should rather be your companions than your victims."

So saying, the pheasant raised himself to his full height and gave a loud crow, upon which Tommy's feathers all dropped from him as if by magic, whilst close to him appeared a new jacket, waistcoat, and trousers, which exactly fitted, and in which he immediately dressed. To his great surprise, he saw right before him the path which led to his father's house; he walked up it as if in a dream, entered the house, rubbed his eyes, looked around, and found everything just the same as he had left it a year ago. Of course magic had been at work, for nobody seemed to have missed him, and nobody said anything to him about his long absence. But during that absence he had learned a lesson which was useful to him throughout the whole of his life, and Tommy was ever after known as the bird-loving boy, who never robbed nests, but rather preferred to listen to the songs of the little warblers, from whose notes he said that he learned so much and received such great enjoyment that he could never bear the thought of lessening their number by his former amusement of birds'-nesting.

VIII.

ROBIN-A-BOBBIN-A-BILBERRY-BEN.

OF all nursery rhymes and legends which have ever yet been produced, there is one which has probably puzzled the infant brain more than any other, and which has never yet been fully and finally explained to the juvenile world. The specimen of nursery literature to which I allude tells us that

> "Robin-a-Bobbin-a-Bilberry Ben
> Ate more victuals than threescore men:
> A cow and a calf—an ox and a half—
> The church and the steeple—and all the good people;
> And then he declared that he hadn't had enough!"

The wonderful size to which this ancient hero must have attained, the extraordinary nature of the feat—and feast—which he is said to have accomplished, and the utter contempt for truth and self-respect which could prompt him to make so greedy and degrading a declaration as that which is here put into his mouth—these are all subjects which I have long felt to be worthy of further investigation than has been generally bestowed upon them.

Naturally fond of antiquarian research and legendary lore, I have thought it right, in the interest of the children of England, to follow the matter up, if possible, to its very source; and I am thus at last able to present to the world an account of this illustrious person and his performances, which, if not entirely accurate in each and every minute detail, has at least as much of probability in it as can fairly be expected from the nature of the case. I shall not delay my readers by quoting my authorities, but if any person should feel inclined to disbelieve any portion of the story which I am about to tell, I will respectfully invite him or her to search for himself or herself among the records of ancient times, and to produce, if possible, a more probable and more amusing version of the affair. Upon my first undertaking to investigate the matter, I thought it not unlikely that I might discover some connection between the extraordinary meal of Robbin-a-Bobbin-a-Bilberry-Ben and that of the Devonshire Bull, who is reported to have swallowed the man and the woman and the seven small children. In this, however, I was entirely mistaken. So far as I can discover, my hero was never in or near Devonshire, and the Bull in question has doubtless a history of his own, which either I or some other lover of old legends may perhaps discover and give to the world at a future time. My present tale is of the North Country; and I must transport my readers at once to bleak and barren mountain tops, and to a quiet village in the wildest part of the county of Cumberland, where, for the most part, occurred the wonderful adventures upon which have been founded this good old nursery rhyme.

Robin Ben, or Benn, as it is written by some of the more ancient chroniclers, was born of poor but honest and industrious parents in the village above mentioned, the name of which I abstain from giving, lest the feelings of any of its present inhabitants should be hurt, or their nerves shocked, by the narration of the circumstances which occurred in their beloved hamlet in the old, long-forgotten times of which I write. From his earliest infancy it was very evident that Robin was no ordinary child. His huge frame, long limbs, and wild haggard look caused him to be regarded as something uncommon and uncanny, and he was not in much request as a playfellow by other children of his own age. Nor, indeed, did he appear to desire or to feel the want of their companionship. On the contrary, he loved to roam alone upon the wild mountain-side, where he would remain for hours together; and the games usually so agreeable to boys appeared to possess for him little or no attraction.

Not far from his father's cottage there was a deep, wide, wild glen, on either side of which the mountains rose, towering to the skies in solemn grandeur, and striking with deep mysterious awe those who gazed upon them from below; and in the vast caves hollowed out of the mountain-side in ages long past, dwelt two Giants, whose fame had gone forth throughout the whole of Cumberland, and whose names were held in dread over the whole of the North of England. Brave as Englishmen are, and bold among the brave as are the hardy northern borderers, scarce one among them but felt a cold shudder pass through him as he heard mention of the terrible names of Bobbin and Bilberry. They dwelt one on each side

of the glen which I have mentioned, which from this cause was shunned by all the people of the country side, and was rarely trodden by the foot of man. Yet around and about that glen did Robin love to roam, and no threats or warnings from his parents could induce him to give up his rambles, or choose another and more frequented spot for his favourite occupation. So, little by little, it came to pass that some of the dread and mystery of the glen began to cling to Robin, and people began to shun him more and more, and to look upon him as a being different from themselves. Gradually it began to be whispered that the terrible Giants, who had caused such misery in the country round, looked with more friendly eyes upon Robin than upon the rest of mortals; and it was even darkly hinted that he had been more than once the means of betraying into their clutches some unhappy being who had lost his way upon the mountains. This terrible suspicion having been mentioned to his father, the latter questioned his son as to its truth, being much grieved that such things should be said of anyone belonging to his family. No sooner, however, were the words out of his mouth than he regretted that they had ever been spoken. Robin jumped from his chair, gave one howl of rage and fury, and literally foamed at the mouth with passion. He then proceeded to break the three-legged stool upon which he had been seated, hurled his cup into one corner of the room, his saucer into another, and jumped upon his plate until it was smashed to atoms. Then, with another wild cry of rage, he rushed like a madman to the door and disappeared in the darkening shadows of the evening.

Great was the grief of his father, bitter the lamentations of his mother, and loud the wailings of his terrified brothers and sisters. All, however, had no effect whatever upon Master Robin, who went forth with a determination never again to return to the quiet cottage home from which he fled on that sad evening. Indeed, I can tell you little more of that home, or of the family which he left behind him in his flight. I am inclined to believe that his father and mother continued to live in their peaceful, frugal manner until their lives came to an end in the natural course of events. I have no reason to believe that anything extraordinary happened to any of the young Benns, and I believe that members of the family still exist in the wilds of Cumberland, though I never heard that they claimed or sought to establish relationship with their great ancestor Robin. Great he certainly was, in one sense of the word ; for if tradition speaks the truth, he took refuge with the two mighty Giants, Bobbin and Bilberry, and rapidly grew into a Giant himself, and one moreover of extraordinary size and strength. The Giants adopted him as their child, fostered his ripening powers, encouraged him in the ordinary amusements of young Giants, taught him the Giant language and all the ogre tricks they knew, and were, in fact, exceedingly proud of him. The teaching, however, of wicked persons, clever though they may be, can never be really useful to anybody ; and although Robin learned to be wise in the ways of the mighty beings with whom he dwelt, he lacked that peace of mind and quiet content which might have come from the more pure and simple teaching which he would have received in the old cottage

home which he had abandoned. He grew up cruel and greedy, idle and thoughtless, selfish and cunning, and was altogether as disagreeable a young ogre as ever existed.

Nor was their adopted child of any very great advantage to the two old Giants. He delighted to set them by the ears. In former times, although they had been dire enemies of the surrounding mortals, they had generally kept on pretty good terms with each other. Now, however, things were very different. Robin never lost a chance of getting up a quarrel between the two, and on these occasions the noise of their warrings and fightings alarmed the whole neighbourhood. The simple peasants had at first imagined that they were but listening to the distant murmurings of the mountain storms; but as they became better acquainted with the facts, they knew but too well the voices of Bobbin and Bilberry, and shuddered with fright at the wild cries which were borne to their ears through the mountain mists on a still evening when they were about retiring to their peaceful rest. I do not know whether Robin had laid a deep plan against the two Giants, intending to benefit thereby, and to turn their quarrels to his own advantage, but he certainly managed matters so well that from being tolerably good friends, they became bitter foes, and at last the crisis came in the shape of a great and terrible battle between the two, in which Bilberry fell a victim to his more powerful antagonist. Robin now established himself in Bilberry's cave, and claimed all his property. This Bobbin would probably have resented, had he not unfortunately been rendered incapable of doing so by a little accident which befel him. Having been

lucky enough to capture a real live Dean, he proceeded to swallow him whole; but having forgotten to take off his shovel-hat first, was choked by the latter, and died miserably.

Thus, then, did Robin find himself the undisputed owner of both the caves and all the wealth of these rich and powerful Giants. He was not slow to profit by the events which had happened. He fitted up both the caves; he took the names "a-Bobbin-a-Bilberry" in addition to his own, and made every preparation for enjoying himself for the rest of his life. His name grew more and more terrible every year, and every year he grew larger and larger, and more and more furious and ravenous. But, after a while, he found his life somewhat lonely, and determined that a wife would be a great improvement. Where, however, was he to find one? The peasants fled at his approach, the castles of the great men of the land were bolted and barred against him; and, like all Giants, he hated to go near towns, where the bustle and flurry of the place would set his brain in a whirl and be altogether too much for him. He would have advertised in the county newspapers, only there did not happen to be any newspapers in those days; and, in short, he really did not know what to do, or how to set about the business of getting a wife. At last, however, he heard by some strange and mysterious means that there was in the neighbouring country of Scotland, a young lady of surpassing beauty, just the very person for the wife of an ogre. She was of an ancient and honourable family, whose name (as they are not extinct even in the present day) I forbear to give, but who are

believed to have been in the world for a longer time than any other family who are known to exist. One would suppose that they must have had Spanish blood in their veins, for the young lady's name was Bianca, which has a Spanish sound about it. She, however, was very unlike a Spaniard, for Spaniards are generally dark, whilst she was beautifully fair, with lovely blue eyes, light hair, and the most charming figure you can possibly imagine. She walked like a queen, and in every movement showed a mingled grace and dignity which was quite enough to have captivated half-a-dozen ogres upon the spot. Upon this lady, then, did Robin set his heart, and determined to make a voyage to Scotland in the hope of catching and carrying her off to his Cumberland hills. The journey was long and the roads bad, but Robin's size and strength were such that he performed the distance in a much shorter space of time than you would have thought possible, and arrived at the northern home of his intended bride much before he was wanted. In fact, you know, he wasn't wanted there at all. The Scotch had plenty of Giants of their own, not to mention Brownies and water kelpies, and a number of other strange creatures which always loved the land of the Gael, and to see a great big English Giant come striding along to carry off the loveliest lady in all Scotland was by no means a sight which any of the people of the country desired. He arrived, however, and I daresay his adventures were very amusing and extraordinary. Unfortunately, however, there are no means of knowing what they were. He lost his diary, if he ever kept one, and there were, as I have told you, no newspapers

to mark his progress and mention all that happened to him, as is done in the case of great personages who travel now-a-days. If any mayors and corporations came out to meet him, and duly chronicled in the big books of their towns all that he said, how he looked and what he ate, those books have long ago been lost; in fact, the records of the country tell nothing about him, and no one would have known that he had ever taken this journey if I had not managed to find it out by means only known to myself. It is very certain, however, that Robin-a-Bobbin-a-Bilberry-Ben *did* go to Scotland, and, what is more, that he carried off the lovely Bianca to his mountain home. And here it is that my story grows more particular in its details, for tradition, scanty at first, has, when duly sought out and cultivated, enabled me to discover pretty correctly what were the real facts of the case upon which this famous legend has been founded.

I have said that Bianca was very beautiful. She was also very good, which we all know is much better than being beautiful; and being very good, she was by no means fit to be the wife of a wicked ogre; nor would she consent to marry him after he had carried her off. Incensed by her refusal, which he could overcome neither by threats nor entreaties, Robin hit upon a scheme which he thought might possibly induce her to consent. He vowed solemnly upon the thumb-nail of his right hand, which was the most binding oath which an ogre could possibly take, that until Bianca consented to be his wife, he would devour a young maiden once a month, who must be brought to him from the neighbouring country ready for cooking;

that is to say, without hair-pins or crinoline, of both of which articles he was much afraid, especially since Bobbin's untimely accident. He held out terrible threats, moreover, that if the maidens were not brought at the proper time and to the proper place, he would lay the whole country waste, and eat every man, woman, and child he could catch. This was most unpleasant news for the neighbourhood, and made the Lady Bianca exceedingly miserable also. To marry an ogre would be most disagreeable, and was a thing to which she could by no means bring her mind, and neither by birth, education, nor appearance was Robin a person to whom she could ever be attached. On the other hand, it would be a serious matter to bring upon an innocent neighbourhood so great a misfortune as that with which it was threatened in the event of her continued refusal; besides which, if the supply of maidens should at any time run short, she was by no means sure that the ogre might not think it desirable to settle the question by making a meal of *her*, which was a result she could hardly contemplate without a shudder. So, all things considered, the beautiful lady—instead of following the example of all well-conducted heroines, refusing to do anything she didn't like, insulting her oppressor whenever she had an opportunity, and being at last rescued from his clutches by some bold and valiant knight whom she afterwards married—instead of doing all these fine things, Bianca made up her mind to become Mrs. Robin, forget his size, ignorance, and bad habits, and make the best of it, with his fine caves and great wealth. Of course no young lady of the present day would dream of doing such a thing;

but then, Bianca lived a long while ago, and was perhaps not so wise as young ladies are now. At all events, she did what she thought best, and was married to Robin-a-Bobbin-a-Bilberry-Ben as comfortably as possible. To be sure there was some difficulty in getting bridesmaids, as Robin's recent threat was fresh in everybody's mind, but somehow or other the difficulty was got over, and the wedding day passed off without anything going wrong. From that moment a certain change was apparent in Robin: he appeared with his hair cut, his beard and whiskers trimmed, and even, on more than one occasion, with gloves on his hands. Nay, more, he contented himself with eating mutton and beef, devoured his vegetables boiled instead of raw, as heretofore, and quite left off eating cheese with his knife. A good influence was evidently at work, and those who remembered his family and had grieved at his strange and terrible course of life, began to have hopes of him again. It is, however, much more easy to do wrong than to return to the right path when you have once quitted it, and Robin was not destined to be an exception to this general rule. It is true that he became more civilized under Bianca's care, and after a time she actually brought him to part his hair, and take off his dirty boots when he came into the drawing-room. But the old ogre habits still prevailed, and now and then cropped up when they were least expected. Twice did Bianca miss a child from her Sunday class under strange circumstances, and both times caught her husband licking his lips significantly in a corner. True, in each case it was the naughtiest child in the class, who hadn't learned its collect, and didn't know

a word of its Catechism ; but *that* was no reason why it should be eaten—if eaten it was. So Bianca was not very happy about the matter, although it lightened one part of her duties, which was daily becoming more and more tiresome and difficult. This was the ordering of the ogre's dinner. His appetite, always good, had now become enormous ; there seemed no satisfying him. Fish, meat, poultry, all disappeared down that voracious throat, and still would Robin ask for more. The situation was really quite distressing, and it was only by judicious doses of brimstone and treacle, or large portions of very heavy plum-pudding, that Bianca could ever stay the appetite of her monster husband.

Things were in this state, when an event occurred which eventually led to the invention of that good old nursery rhyme which chronicles the deeds of our hero. Encouraged by the quiet behaviour of Robin, the neighbouring peasants began to approach his territory more readily. Houses sprang up on the mountain-side, men went to their work, women performed their household duties, children played about the hills and glen, and a new era seemed to have dawned upon that wild region. Then came, little by little, more houses and more people, and at last they built a tiny church on the slope of the mountain, not far from Robin's abode, with steeple, weathercock, bells and all complete. I don't know whether any of the people left their cards on Robin or not ; but perhaps people hadn't any cards in those days, and if so they probably didn't. But all went on well and quietly, and the whole country seemed likely to settle down and forget the sad history of the past. This, however,

was not to be. It was written in the book of fate that the nursery rhyme was to be made—founded upon fact—and therefore the events occurred which I have now to relate.

After she had struggled for some time against the difficulties which she had to encounter in feeding her husband, the lovely Bianca found it absolutely necessary to enter into a contract with the neighbouring farmers and butchers, to supply her household weekly with a large quantity of meat. If report speak true, the quantity thus supplied was indeed enormous; and although the number of sheep has not been handed down to us, yet, if we are to believe the tale that nine oxen every week were not more than enough for the Giant, that portion of the rhyme which refers to "an ox and a half"—meaning of course an ox and a half each day—will be thus explained. By this plan the lady managed to satisfy her husband's appetite to some extent; and could things have so continued, all might have been well. Unfortunately, however, this was not to be. The demands of Robin were greater than the neighbourhood could supply. It was, as I have said, a barren country, and the people were poor. Gradually their flocks and herds decreased, and at the same time Robin declared that he was growing visibly thinner, and should certainly die unless he could obtain more food. "Sixty men," says the old chronicle, "could scarce have devoured the victuals which were consumed by this mighty Giant at his daily meal;" and here again we find the explanation of another line in our old song. Still, however, matters might have been arranged, had it not been for another event which altered the

whole course of affairs. In those days there was much ill-blood between the Scotch and the inhabitants of the northern counties of England; an inroad of one into the country of the other was of no uncommon occurrence, and people led wild and exciting lives if they dwelt anywhere near the border.

The excursion of Robin and his capture of Bianca had caused great indignation among the warlike Scotch, and especially among the clan to which the lady belonged. Deep and dire vengeance had been vowed, and it was only the terror inspired by the size and strength of the ogre which had hitherto prevented an attempt being made to fulfil that vow and punish the bold robber. Bianca had several brothers, who were determined if possible to rescue their sister; and about this time they had sufficiently recovered their courage to resolve upon the attempt. Unable, however, to encounter the power of Robin without other than ordinary aid, they hired at a great price two Giants from the Highlands of Scotland, and, entering England, advanced boldly as far as Cumberland, and approached the territory of our hero. Robin at first treated their approach with contempt, and declared that the only thing he was afraid of was the noise of their bagpipes, which he particularly disliked. As, however, they drew nearer and nearer, he began to arouse himself, and at first tried to frighten them by roaring after the usual manner of hungry and excited ogres. To this, however, the Scotch Giants replied by roars of a similar character, and rendered all the worse by being exceedingly out of tune. Moreover, such a smell of whisky pervaded the whole mountain, that Robin, who was a Giant of strict sobriety, and detested spirits, found it

exceedingly unpleasant. Worse, however, was to come. Whilst Robin was occupied in watching the invading army, and especially keeping his eye upon the two Giants, whose names have not been handed down to posterity, the three brothers of Bianca had resolved upon a desperate attempt to recover their sister. They advanced across the mountain in the disguise of shepherds, and visited the houses which had sprung up near the church on the hill-side. It is impossible to discover whether they persuaded the people to assist them, or whether they performed their task without the aid of treachery. Certain it is, that whilst Robin fondly imagined that all was safe, on that side at least, and that the natural hatred of his neighbours to their Scotch invaders would prevent the possibility of any such alliance between them as might injure him, the three brothers penetrated even to his favourite cave, and obtained access to their long-lost sister. It is unknown whether she willingly left her mountain home. No one ever *can* know it now, for it is a point upon which tradition is silent. The only ascertained fact is that she fled with, or was taken off by, her brothers, and that their object was thus successfully accomplished. Robin returned home to find Bianca gone and his enemies so far triumphant. His rage, as you may well believe, knew no bounds. He threw himself upon the ground, gnashed his teeth, tore up the grass by handfuls, and gave vent to the wildest cries of rage and grief. After a while, he suddenly arose, seized in his hands the first weapon which he could find, which happened to be a young ash-tree of no contemptible size, and, armed with this, rushed off in the direction of the Scotch host.

Now, as soon as Bianca's brothers had got their sister safe and sound, they had commenced their retreat as fast as possible; and before Robin had discovered his loss they were already far from the place. The main body of the army, however, had taken matters somewhat more leisurely, and Robin came up with them when they were actually in doubt whether to advance or to retreat. He soon settled the question. His size, ferocious aspect, and loud roarings, more terrible than any ever heard in England since the time of the Dragon of Wantley of high renown, struck terror into the hearts of his opponents. They hesitated, trembled, and would have fled instantly but for the presence of their Giant allies. The latter advanced boldly to meet Robin, and howled in their loudest tones as he approached. They had, however, met more than their match;—dropping his tree, with a tremendous thwack, upon the head of one of them, he felled him lifeless to the ground; and seizing the other in his arms like a baby, he hurled him down among the rocks with a force which deprived him for ever after of the power of doing hurt to mortal man. At this sight the terrified army fled in every direction, whilst Robin, more intent upon recovering Bianca than upon the slaughter of his enemies, rushed wildly from place to place in search of her. All was in vain! The mountains resounded with the name of "Bianca" as Robin shouted it aloud again and again. But Bianca was never to return. Then finding his search fruitless, he hurried back to his cave and abandoned himself to utter despair. For several days his cries and groans rent the air, and the terrified neighbours listened in fear and trembling.

Then came the grand finish of this truthful history. The pangs of hunger began to assail the mighty Giant; with them came back the old ogre feelings and wishes —why should he abstain any longer from his old doings, since *she* had been taken from him, for whose sake he had become quiet, orderly, and respectable? What had he to hope for, whom to care for, now? And then the thought crossed him that treachery must have been at work, or Bianca never could have been stolen. Enraged at the very idea, and half-famished with his self-inflicted fast, the furious Giant sallied forth to attack those neighbours upon whom his suspicions fell. It was a bright Sunday morning, and the poor people were assembled in their little church, when they heard the approaching roar of the infuriated ogre. It is difficult to imagine their feelings of horror; it is still more difficult to imagine the enormous size of the Giant, if the chronicle be true, for he is said to have then and there devoured church and people with as little delay as that which a school-boy makes over an ordinary plum-cake. And then comes the most extraordinary part of the story. Raising himself up upon the mountain-side, the only half-satisfied Giant proclaimed at the top of his voice, that he still felt empty, and required more victuals to supply his wants and appease his appetite. Scarcely, however, had the words been uttered, when upon the mountain-side there appeared a man of venerable aspect, dressed as a pilgrim, and carrying an enormous staff, which he stretched out towards Robin, addressing him at the same time in tones of stern rebuke. "Wretch!" he exclaimed, "you have had time to repent of the crimes of your early life, but instead of

doing so, you have gone from bad to worse. Not content with breaking your father's heart, forsaking your mother, and neglecting your family, you have preferred the life of an ogre to that of an honest man; and, as if other crimes were not sufficient, you have wreaked your vengeance for the loss of a wife, whom you had stolen from her friends, upon the heads of your innocent neighbours. Know, villain, that you have at last gone a step too far. I am St. Cuthbert, to whom was dedicated the little church which you have just so cruelly disestablished and destroyed. I never stand any nonsense with my churches; and in consequence of your wicked act, your power and life shall now end together." Then the Saint waved his staff aloft in the air, and the ogre felt life and breath suddenly fade from him. One loud cry of despair he gave, whilst his miserable carcase was slowly transformed into a huge rock, jutting up from the side of the mountain, of which it thenceforward formed a part.

From that day to this has that rock existed, and when the shepherds are roaming with their sheep over these hills, and amusing one another with the mountain legends of past days, they point out this as "Robin's Rock," and they will often stop and listen for the sound of the church-bells, which they say can be heard from time to time within it. For the church bells, being blessed and holy things, could not be turned into rock like the carcase of the Giant; and so they are said to remain in their old form and shape, and ever and anon to send out their sweet sounds in the midnight stillness, solemnly and mournfully wailing over the misused strength and deserved punishment of the Giant. Just

so, any pure and holy thought which has been placed in the heart of man will not die out and be destroyed at once by the evil with which he too often surrounds it: it will fade and wither, indeed, if he neglect it, but it bides there all the same, as long as his life lasts, ready to be cherished and fostered if only he will repent and turn to it; and, if so treated, able to overcome the evil, and even yet to leaven and turn his whole heart to better things. But if a man or a child stifles the good thought, though it ask to be heard again and again, at last, with his life, it will die out, and be no more there to help him. And whether or no the church bells really sound still in the Robin Rock, that which is fabled to have once been alive is but rock now, and no sweet sounds can ever charm it back to life and happiness.

This, then, was the end of Robin-a-Bobbin-a-Bilberry-Ben, and the only part of the rhyme of which I can give no explanation is that which relates to the "cow and the calf." I am inclined to think that these words were merely put in for the sake of the rhyme, and that there really is no other explanation to be given. It is but right to say, that there is another version of the old legend. This other story runs thus: that Robin-a-Bobbin-a-Bilberry-Ben was the name of a huge mountain (whence derived no one ever knew) which formerly existed in that wild part of Cumberland, and was never a Giant at all. But in some wondrous convulsions of nature, the earth was tossed hither and thither in a marvellous manner, and a church full of people, together with much cattle and many sheep, were swallowed up in the earthquake. So came to pass the saying that Robin had

swallowed more victuals than threescore men; and thus arose the old nursery hymn which I have been trying to explain. Of course I can only tell you what has been told to me, and you must judge for yourselves of the truth of the legend. All I know is that if you walk out over those wild Cumberland hills, you will hear strange sounds and noises, some of which may just as well as not be caused by the doings inside the rock which once was Robin. But whencesoever they may come, they are cheerful sounds to me after the bustle and heat and noise and dust of London; the sheep-bells on the mountain are, anyhow, better than the hurdy-gurdy in the streets; the bark of the shepherd's dog is more cheerful than the double knock at the door; the shepherd himself is a happier-looking fellow, I think, than the smart London footman; and the pure fresh mountain air is something for which the Londoner may sigh in vain. It is the country above all others for wild, strange legends; and, whether you believe it or not, I cannot help thinking that there is something in the tale I have told you, and that, if Robin-a-Bobbin-a-Bilberry-Ben ever lived at all, Cumberland was his country, and the bleak, bare mountains the spot which he selected for his home.

IX.

CHRISTMAS MORNING.

It was Christmas morning: not one of your new-fangled, modern Christmas mornings, wet and damp, warm and muggy, so that, as far as the weather was concerned, it might just as well have been any other morning of the year and not Christmas at all. No! this was a regular, good, honest, old-fashioned Christmas morning, such as our great-grandfathers and grandmothers always used to rejoice in, and which we are always right glad to see when it dawns upon us. The ground was white with a thin crust of snow, which dazzled your eyes as the bright rays of the sun shone down upon it, and crackled under your feet as you walked along the paths. Bright indeed the sun shone out upon the white world, but the cold was stronger than he was, and seemed to freeze up his warmth before it could reach the frost-bound earth. Now and then he sent forth a warmer ray than usual, as if he was anxious to warm the cold world if he could, and then a crust of snow on the top branches of the highest trees would

slide off to escape from the ray, and come dropping down through the branches; and directly afterwards a cold, chill wind would come blowing through the twigs with a low sighing sound, as if to harden the snow on the boughs, and to protest against the sun's interfering with the arrangements of old King Winter.

Merry Christmas indeed! who wouldn't have a merry Christmas on a morning like that, when the outside cold seemed to make the heart inside you feel warm out of very contrast, and the sun and the snow and the clear blue sky seemed all to speak of joy and happiness, and to tell in nature's own sweet voice of the peace and goodwill which the holy, happy season brought once upon earth, but brought to stay for ever, with those whose hearts are loving and simple enough to take the gift and cherish it with childlike faith and endless gratitude to the Giver!

In front of the old manor-house, where the lawn sloped down to the sunk fence at the further end of it, the laurels on either side had a heavier coating of snow than most of the trees. But even *they* could not hold as much as the grand old yew-trees in the shrubbery on one side of the lawn, for it really seemed as if the snow liked them better than any other trees that grew, and there they stood with regular white great-coats on, and their dark green peeping out here and there as if to say, "I am not quite covered up yet. Snow again, old Winter, if you please, for I can carry more of your pretty white feathers still." Ay, and old Winter meant to snow again, too, when the evening came on, and there was no sun to interfere with him; then he would have it all

his own way, and the big flakes of snow would come dropping lazily down, and cover up all the green there was left, enough to satisfy even the dear old snow-loving yew-trees and all the other evergreens. Then people would stir their fires and rub their hands and draw round the cosy table near the fire-place, and warm themselves cheerily within and without, and say how seasonable the weather was, and how jolly one always felt at Christmas-time. But the evening had not come yet, and the morning sun had not spent his power; and there were patches of green on the white lawn, on which the blackbird hopped, looking as pert as a bird could look, with his yellow beak and his black coat, peering everywhere for food, and wondering why the world had changed its colours since he went to roost the night before. And the robin came out too, and looked up with his merry eye at the breakfast-room window, and waited for the crumbs which he knew the children would scatter presently—and quite on the top of the high elm-trees sat the oldest rook that lived in that part of the country, looking round as far over the fields as he could, and thinking of all the hard winters he had known in former years, and now and then giving a loud caw as some thought came across him which he wished to express in the usual manner of a well-to-do rook.

Oh, it was a real cheerful morning, enough to make you feel kind and friendly towards every one, and to soften the hardest heart that ever beat within the breast of man. It *did* do something in that way, I think, for old Farmer Grubbins, who was known far and near as a surly old codger, and a terrible fellow at

the union for cutting down poor people's "relief" to the lowest possible point, was positively seen to stop in the church road, fumble in his waistcoat pocket for a bit, and then put a bright new sixpence into the hand of a poor half-starved boy who was standing shivering by the roadside, watching the people as they trooped along to church. I'll warrant you it was Christmas that softened the old farmer's heart, and he felt all the better for the kindly deed as he entered the church porch and walked up to the old pew where he had sat Sunday after Sunday for two-and-forty years, ever since he had first come into the parish and taken the Court Lodge Farm. And when he had said his usual little prayer into his hat, as well-instructed Englishmen generally do before they take their seats in church, I'll be bound that little silver sixpence, given in love and charity, made it all the more likely that the prayer would be heard, and the worthy old farmer receive his full share of the happiness that Christmas-tide brings with it in its train.

Oh, how pleasant the dear old church looked upon that bright Christmas-day! It was decked with evergreens, cut from the shrubberies of the great house, and arranged according to the faultless taste of the daughter of the said great house, sweet Adela Deringham, assisted by the active hands of many a village volunteer. Christmas-like looked the green holly, and cheery with its red berries, decorating the pews on each side as you walked down the church, and seeming to give you a hearty welcome as you came to join your fellow-men in the praise and thanksgiving which is more than ever due to the Creator from His

creatures at this holy, happy season. And presently there came trooping along the aisle, two and two, the village school-children, with their neat straw bonnets and bright red cloaks, and cheeks nearly as bright and red with the healthy cold; the bonnets and cloaks were Lady Deringham's Christmas gift, but the healthy red cheeks were given, under Providence, by the air and food of our own merry England, and you might search far before you found such happy samples of health and strength in any other country. And after them, when the people had dropped in, one after the other, till the church was nearly full, came the old clergyman who had been rector of that parish for many and many a long year, had christened more than half of those who formed his congregation that day, had married many, and had committed to their last earthly home relations of nearly every one there. Old he was in years, but his figure was upright and his step was firm, and he looked round with a loving eye upon his people as he took his place at the desk from which he had so often read to them the words of the blessed Book and the prayers of the most beautiful Liturgy by means of which man ever sought the throne of his Maker. Upon the walls of the church, opposite the old rector, and on each side of him, were broad white scrolls with texts of Scripture upon them in large red letters, pleasant for the eye to see, and yet full easy to be read by the simplest scholar. These were Adela's work too, for she was the rector's right hand in the parish, and loved to aid in the ornamental as well as the useful part of church work. And it was she who now sat down to play the organ; and as the cheerful, blessed words of the dear old hymn—

"Hark, the herald angels sing"—rang through the sacred building, they brought with them the same hope and love, the same peace and goodwill, the same sense of being further from earth's sorrows and nearer to heaven's happiness, which for more than eighteen hundred years they have brought to mortal ears, ever since the simple shepherds watched over their flocks upon that night of nights when the good tidings were told them of that great joy which Heaven vouchsafed to send to earth, and for which mortal hearts should for ever rejoice, and mortal voices for ever pour forth a glad strain of grateful thanksgiving.

The last verse of the hymn had been sung, and the sweet sounds of the organ were still dying away, when the entrance of a stranger attracted the momentary notice of the rustic congregation. Strangers were not common in those parts, and the villagers turned their heads, in the pause before the rector began the service, to see who it was that walked with soft footsteps into the church, and seated himself in a vacant pew. The figure was one at which, when you had once looked, you instantly felt an impulse to look again, which impulse was felt and obeyed by many of the church congregation upon that Christmas-day. It was the figure of a tall and well-made man, whose sunburnt face told of travels under warmer skies than those of old England; whilst the open face, chestnut hair, and clear blue eyes spoke unmistakeably of English origin. And when he raised himself up amidst the congregation, his earnest gaze upon the scene before him, and attention to every word which fell from the old rector, showed that he had come with good and holy purpose to that sacred place. So the service

passed on, and the prayers were ended, and the venerable clergyman mounted the pulpit and gave out his text to his people. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given," were the words he chose—appropriate to the great Festival which they had met to celebrate. He was not a preacher who dealt in fine language, which might sometimes puzzle the poor heads instead of softening the hearts of those who heard him. Neither were his sermons so long as some might have thought desirable, but somehow or other this good old man had a way of going deeper into the hearts of his hearers in his simple sermons, which never exceeded and seldom came up to twenty minutes in length, than many who go on for twice the time. And as he preached to his people upon this Christmas-day and told them the old, old story of the day in his simple language, the whole scene seemed to pass before their eyes: the stable with the stalled oxen—the lowly manger—the blessed mother—the Eastern offerers of precious gifts—the shepherds with their hearts full of the wonderful vision of good tidings,—and the Holy Child himself, the Son who was given this day to raise and save the race of fallen man. The story was old, but it was one that never wearies. The words were plain and simple, but they went to the hearts of them that heard, because they came from the heart of him that spoke, and the atmosphere around was one of pure and childlike Faith; Faith that knows no doubt of those blessed truths, but which triumphs and ever will triumph in its simplicity over the wisdom of the learned and the deep subtlety of the searcher after hidden things.

The sermon was ended and the service over; forth

from the church door the congregation came flocking out, whilst again the church-bells struck up their joyful notes, speaking love and peace to those who heard, as they had spoken to their fathers before them, and would speak again to their children after them. And the stranger came out with the rest, lingering somewhat, and casting an eye round the old church as he slowly walked towards the porch, and passing to the gate with slow steps, as if he left the place with regret and would fain the service had lasted longer. Forth came the people, old and young, with smiling faces and cheerful voices, wishing each other a "Merry Christmas," and walking with light hearts over the crisp ground, as they went to the happy homes which would that day be rendered happier still by the quiet, hallowed joy of Christmas-tide.

And after the congregation had left the churchyard and wended their way to their several homes, the stranger still lingered behind. He looked up at the great old yew-tree which had stood there, strong and stalwart, whilst generation after generation of children had played around its mighty trunk, had talked beneath its spreading branches, had passed by it Sunday after Sunday on their way to church, and had been carried by it at last to be laid, in their turn, in the quiet resting-places of the old churchyard. He looked up at it with loving eye, as if he were gazing at an old friend, and then he turned and wandered amongst the green mounds of grass, each of which marked the spot where rested some former inhabitant of the village.

Nothing strange or uncommon was there to an eye accustomed to an English churchyard. The simple

stones at the head of the graves bore the usual old inscriptions: how this person had suffered long—how that another had been snatched suddenly away in his youth—how another had lived away far off, but had been carried back to be buried in the place where his forefathers had been laid before him; and on most of the stones you might read some text of Scripture, breathing hope for the departed and comfort for those who had been left behind to mourn. And so the stranger made his way among the graves, and sighed gently to himself as he thought of the quiet dead who had passed away to their rest, and of his own stormy life, a life of restless work and action, for which the hour of peace and repose seemed still far, very far, off. For Charles Dallas had been possessed by an unquiet spirit from his boyhood. Two-and-twenty years ago he had left that happy village, a truant from his home, though having barely attained the age of thirteen, and since then he had been a wanderer over the face of the earth, knowing no home and seeking no resting-place for the sole of his feet. And yet, although the old proverb tells us that "rolling stone gathers no moss," young Dallas had prospered in the world, and at the age of thirty-five was beyond the fear of want or the cares of poverty. Then there came into his heart a longing after home, a craving which could not be satisfied, a yearning for the old familiar scenes and the dear faces of early days, and across the blue waters of the ocean he crossed as if driven by fate, and reached the village upon that same Christmas-day of which I have been telling you. And as the bells rang out their merry peals in honour of the blessed morn, they struck chords in the young man's heart

which had been still and silent of late, and stirred to their depths memories which had long been quiet; it seemed as if only yesterday he had listened to those bells as a merry boy, and something of the spirit of boyhood came back to him with the sound of their tuneful chimes. So he had entered the church and listened to the service, and now he wandered to and fro about the churchyard, as if meditating some step which yet he hesitated to take. And then, as he stood, forth from the chancel door came the old rector, his reverend form bent with the weight of years, his venerable head white with the snows of many winters; and slowly he picked his way through the churchyard towards the little door which opened into his garden, carefully treading so as not to set his feet upon any of the graves in which rested those of his flock who had gone before him to their last account. He had approached the door and was now within a few paces of it, when his eyes suddenly lighted upon the stranger, standing with folded arms and gazing upon him with a look of mingled reverence and affection.

The old rector lifted his hat, with the old-fashioned courtesy of days, alas! passing, if not passed, away. "A merry Christmas to you, sir," he said, "and a happy new year. I wish them both to you, as our custom is in these country parts."

The stranger at first made no reply, but then, stepping forward a couple of paces, exclaimed, in a hasty and agitated tone,—

"Father, don't you recollect me?"

The old man turned pale, and staggered back as if he had been shot.

"Charles!" he exclaimed after a moment, during

which he appeared to be gasping for breath. "Can it be—is it—may it be my boy? Do I really live to see him again with these old eyes?" and with a long eager look, he seized the young man's hand, and in another moment clasped him in his arms, muttering in a low, earnest voice, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace! My son, my son, I have seen thee once again, and I can go now cheerfully whenever my summons may come!"

Tender and loving indeed was the meeting of the two men, though not without that tinge of melancholy which is certain to pervade the meeting of those who have been parted for years and have lost sight of each other's homes and surroundings. Charles's first inquiries were for his mother. With a gentle pressure of the arm, the old man pointed upwards to heaven, and then led his son to a corner of the churchyard, where, enclosed with iron rails, were two large slabs of marble. He pointed with his hand to one—"Here," he said, "here lies all that was mortal of her; and," pointing to the other, "here is my resting-place when I am called to join her."

Charles made no reply, but taking off his hat, knelt down at the foot of his mother's grave, and prayed one of those prayers for which, as they come from a softened heart and chastened spirit, we may hope a speedy passage to the throne before which they are offered. Then he rose, and, linking his arm in that of his father, moved slowly from the spot. They passed the small garden door, and entered the small shrubbery of the rectory, every corner of which was as well known to the young man as if he had never left it. It seemed only yesterday that he was here, and every

tree, every view, reminded him of the past, and conjured up once more the visions and memories of childhood. Then they went into the house, and here, ere long, entered the old clerk who had known Charles Dallas from a child, and who, when he saw him, and was told who he was, declared that he had been sure it was a face he had seen before from the very moment the "stranger" had entered the church, and rushed off to tell the good news in the parish, and suggest to the ringers the propriety of a good hearty peal in honour of the young man's return.

Oh, that was a happy day! The old rector and his son had so much to talk about, that the time for afternoon service had come before they thought it was near, and afterwards, the news having spread abroad through the village, there was such a clustering round the porch and such a hand-shaking and welcoming home as it would have done your heart good to behold. And the news soon reached the great house, too, and there were warm hearts there which felt pleasure at the old rector's joy, and sincere and cordial were the congratulations which were showered upon him by the Deringham family. Adela declared she should be jealous now that her old friend had a child of his own to take care of him, but there was really no room in Adela's heart for jealousy, so stored was it with pure and high and holy feelings such as elevate the best of mortal natures to the level of the beings whose angel forms and spirits have done with mortal things. Now could I weave you out a romance from this little story of a Christmas morning, but that I should spoil the truth of the tale. So I shall leave all of you to make out the rest of the story for yourselves.

I have only drawn you a picture of that which goes on in many and many an English village, and of scenes which may be witnessed in many and many an English county upon the bright and blessed morn of Christmas.

True; every Christmas does not bring back a wandering son to his father, or reunite those who have been parted for long and weary years. But every Christmas, rightly understood, brings with it a holy and happy spirit of content and bliss—every Christmas, duly employed by those who have to give, brings comfort to many a poor heart and balm to many a sorrowing spirit—every Christmas, welcomed and loved in the true and right way, kindles anew the light of hope and trust in Him whose day it is, and leads those who keep His faith nearer to Him and to the heaven which it is His to give to those who love Him.

X.

THE WIZARD OF BOCKHANGER.

THERE are very few places in England so strangely beautiful as Bockhanger Wood. If you chance to be driving from Ashford to Hythe, and have the good fortune to be acquainted with the owner of Mersham Hatch, you have a fine opportunity of viewing the beauties of Bockhanger and judging of them for yourself. Quitting the high road at the bottom of the hill before you reach Hatch Park, you follow the carriage-road which bears slightly to the left, and after some two or three hundred yards, passing through a large white gate, with a small lodge on the right hand, there you are in Bockhanger Wood; and through it you pass for some quarter of a mile or more before you come out again into the broad daylight, at the top of the Horse Park.

But if you are a lover of Nature, and of Nature in her most picturesque form, you take a long time in passing over that quarter of a mile. On each side of you are trees, every one of which might form a study for a painter. Oak, beech, and hornbeam pollards, of immense size and of age untold, are cast about in the

most extraordinary and fantastic shapes; some upright, some slanting one way and some another, some split in every direction by the hand of time, and all presenting together an appearance of weird and grotesque beauty which cannot fail to attract the observation of the most careless traveller. Beneath the shade of these venerable trees, large patches of fern grow in woodland luxuriance, and where the fern grows not, rushes, moss, or dried leaves form the carpet beneath your feet. Go there in the spring, and the noisy jackdaws start from their nests in the holes of the old pollards, and ask you in pretty plain language who you are and what may be your business in *their* wood. Go there again later on, in the summer, and a myriad birds awaken the echoes with their pleasant notes. The soft, tender "coo" of the stock-dove; the sudden rush of the wood-pigeon, scared by your footsteps from her leafy home; the friendly "tap-tap" of the green woodpecker, and the quaint voice of the young jay, imitating the tones of some of his neighbours; all these sounds greet your ears as you tread quietly over ground which seems hallowed by the deep shade of the old trees, and you may easily feel that you are in some enchanted place, where sin and sorrow cannot penetrate, but where Nature and Nature's Master may be mused upon and loved without interruption. And, at any season of the year, the rabbit and the squirrel are always to be found, merry denizens of the favourite wood, and companions to the wanderer who seeks to explore it.

This is Bockhanger Wood as it is, and I feel that even now I have not half described its beauties. And yet I know it so well and love it so well that I ought to

be able to tell you all about it; many and many a happy hour have I passed in Bockhanger, and many and many a thought have I cast back upon it when far, far away from its familiar shades. Well, but I am not going to tell you any more about Bockhanger as it is: it is of the long, long past that I have to speak, and you must prepare to hear strange things.

There are legends about the place, each of which might be weaved into a separate tale. Before the old road was altered, and when the London highway ran through the wood, was it not the scene of more than one deed of violence? Did not the celebrated Ransleys frequent the dark roadside on their fine horses, with the handsome sister, who, dressed as a man, rode with them on their plundering expeditions and bore her share of the danger right manfully? And, years before, was it not here that cruel robbers cut off the head of some unhappy woman, who has, ever since, from time to time, walked sadly in the twilight through Bockhanger, carrying her head in her hands? And, still years before that event, was there not a lovely Lady Knatchbull, who so frequented the wood in her lifetime that she would fain return to it after she had left the world? Have I not seen with my own eyes the bank on which she sits to pluck with ghostly hand the wild strawberries which she loved so well in her life? All these are legends of the dear old wood, and there are others which might be added, but it is not with these I deal to-day.

I must carry you back to old, old times, before any Lady Knatchbull was known to Bockhanger, for though the family even then inhabited Mersham Hatch, the wood and most of the country round belonged to the

holy monks of Canterbury, and I fancy there was no road at all through the forest, but everything bore a wilder and stranger aspect than in the present day, and few sober-minded, honest people cared to approach the place when they could avoid doing so. These were the days of the Wizard of Bockhanger, and it is of that mighty and terrible person that I am going to speak.

Everybody knows the spring at the head of Quillett's Pond, in the green meadows on the Hinxhill side of Bockhanger wood, below which the little branch of the River Stour flows merrily along its alder-fringed channel, and takes its way towards Willesborough and Ashford. Oh, what a pure, sweet spring that is, and always was! When I was a boy, old Stokes the yardman used to carry up daily large pails of the beautiful water to Hatch for "the family's" own drinking, and pretty warm work he must have found it now and then. A water-barrel eventually superseded Stokes, but by whatever means it was conveyed to the great House, conveyed it was, for the Knatchbull family have ever loved to drink of none other water so well as that which came fresh and pure from Quillett's Spring.

Ah! how well I know that spring and the pond and all their surroundings! Many a snipe have I knocked over with my old single-barrelled gun, in the rushes near the spring, at the head of the pond, and in the little streamlet that trickled down from the pond to the stream below. And, to tell you the truth, it was here I learnt several fairy tales and strange old stories, whilst lying on the banks or creeping quietly up for a shot at one of those stray ducks or teal which often lighted on the quiet, lonely pond. Numbers of

moorhens there always were at Quillett's Pond, and though it is not generally known, moorhens are great fanciers of fairy tales, and if once you can manage to learn their language, it is surprising how much information you can gather on these and similar subjects. If it hadn't been for the moorhens, I don't know that I should have been able to tell you this story, and I did not learn the whole of it from *them*, because old Vane, the Hatch butler, was such a terrible hand at catching these simple birds (which is easy enough to do if you mark the spot at which they creep into the reeds, for they hide their heads only, like an ostrich in the sand, and think they are quite safe), that at last they were rarely to be seen, and grew much less communicative than was formerly the case. But I heard enough to make out the rest—with the help of a talkative old rabbit from the large earth in Spring wood—and so without more ado I will tell you what I know.

Close to the aforesaid spring there stands an ancient oak. It always *was* an ancient oak, I think —at least nobody has ever heard of its being anything else; and, if it was ancient at the time of which I am about to write, it must be an uncommonly old customer —quite the Father of oaks—in the present day. Well, this was the Wizard's Oak, known and dreaded by all the people far and near, from stout Nicholas Blechynden of Quarrington Manor, down to Tom Gower, the "helper" at the "Farmers' Arms" at Mersham Forestall. Known and dreaded indeed was this celebrated oak, but yet the fame of the spring was so great, and so high was the value set upon the water, that the country people would come from great distances to obtain it, though they took good care to fix

the time of their visit in the middle of the day, when the sun was shining brightly, and few of them would have ventured there when the shades of evening had begun to close in, or on any of those dark and gloomy days on which witches and wizards are likely to be out on their rambles. But although the oak was the Wizard's Oak and the spring was known as his favourite haunt, Bockhanger wood was supposed to be his real abode, and the Wizard of Bockhanger was the title by which he was known among mortals.

Bockhanger was much larger then than it is now. Mersham Hatch had not been long built, and the wild forest of trees stretched across the whole of what is now the north part of the park, joining close up to Barracks wood on the other side. Game abounded, deer were plentiful, and neither wizard nor mortal man need stand in want of provisions, or, for the matter of that, of sport in obtaining them. Other people besides the Wizard, however, had, or fancied they had, a right to such provisions as Bockhanger supplied; and it would have been difficult to find a more reckless band of poachers than Mersham could supply in those good old days.

I have said that the monks of Canterbury owned the wood, but they were powerless to repress the lawless bands who entered upon their lands and slew their deer; and so it came about that hunting rights in Bockhanger began to be exercised by two other persons of nearer residence than Canterbury, and consequently of greater power to keep off the intruders. These two were Nicholas Blechynden of Quarrington Manor, and John de Baliol of Scott's Hall, between whom much jealousy had long existed,

but who were equally anxious to prevent the slaughter of the deer and game by any one but themselves. Each of these worthies claimed to have the authority of the monks for his hunting in the forest, and probably one had as much of it as the other. However, their watchers kept off the Mersham knaves, and thereby preserved the deer and game to some extent, although the wizard did more than both of them put together, for the fear of him kept many a keen sportsman away from the east side of the wood, which he was believed more particularly to fancy; and there the wild animals couched in comparative security.

There were many curious reports about the Wizard of Bockhanger, but hardly any two of them agreed together. One set him down as a tall man of majestic and venerable appearance, with a long, grey beard flowing down to his girdle. Another painted him as a short personage entirely enveloped in a long cloak, with locks of raven darkness, and eyes which seemed to pierce through and through the person upon whom they were fixed. According to a third rumour he was very aged, and supported his trembling limbs by the aid of a short oak staff; whilst by a fourth account he was young and active, moving with more than ordinary swiftness, and as unlike the common idea of a wizard as anything you can imagine. Different, however, as were these accounts of the mysterious inhabitant of Bockhanger, everybody agreed that there was something wonderful and terrible about him, and that his power was very great. There were those who pretended to have seen him, and from whom came the various reports as to his personal appearance. But either they spoke falsely,

or must have been mistaken, since they varied so much in their tale that the whole country, at the time of which I write, was in doubt, awe, and ignorance as to this remarkable being.

People were not very learned in those days, and you must remember that there were no such things as penny newspapers, or even the penny post, so that it is not very easy to find out the exact truth about people who lived and things which occurred at that time. I believe, however, that Richard the Second was King of England, and if he wasn't, the creatures who told me are mistaken, and you must find fault with them and not with me, who am only repeating the words of others. But whoever was king, neither he nor anybody else in England was so much dreaded in the part of the world of which I write as the celebrated Wizard of Bockhanger, some of whose doings I am about to set forth in truthful narrative.

My story commences at a happy, life-breathing time of year, when Nature seems to begin her existence, and casts off the chill torpor of ice-bound winter. It was upon one of those beautiful spring mornings which delight both the eye and heart of any human being, whose heart and eye are in a state to be delighted at all; the sun was shining brightly, but not too brightly, that is to say, with warmth enough to cheer you without making you unpleasantly hot; a soft breeze was blowing from the south, just sufficient to make the leaves on the tops of the trees acquainted with the fact that there *was* a breeze, and to cause the few light clouds to move gently over the face of the sky; the dewdrops were glistening on the grass and fern; the birds were singing their sweetest songs;

the woodland animals were all coming out to enjoy themselves in the freshness of spring, and Nature's face never looked more lovely or more tranquil. It was upon such a morning, I say, that stout Nicholas Blechynden took his way towards Ashford town, to do which he must needs pass close to Quillett's Pond and the Wizard's Tree. Little cared Nicholas, however, for wizards or witches. Give him his good cross-bow, he was wont to say, or, for the matter of that, his stout oaken staff, and ne'er an evil one of the whole lot should scare him. And he meant what he said, too; and as he strode manfully over the green turf, you would have thought he had small cause to fear attack from any one, if strong frame and sinewy arms could afford any protection to their owner.

This morning, as he walked, he swung his staff lightly in his hand, and whistled right merrily with a cheerful heart. He traversed the green field which lies between Quarrington and the brook or rivulet of the Stour; and entering the long meadow through which the latter runs, he strode on, keeping the course of the stream westward, in the direction always of Quillett's. When he came opposite to the pond, he leapt the brook, and turned off, intending to leave the pond on the left, and cross the rich grass fields in the direction of the Ashford Road. But even as he passed the pond, thinking of no interruption, and still jauntily swinging his staff, he became suddenly aware of the presence of another person.

Seated upon the bank, close to the spring, with his knees drawn up to his chin, and apparently in a state of profound meditation, was an aged man of grave and reverend aspect. A black velvet cap was upon

his ancient head, from beneath which some straggling grey hairs crept out over his venerable forehead; his long white beard hung down over his breast, and his body was enveloped in a cloak of dark grey. Bold Master Nicholas stopped suddenly on beholding him. There was something which *made* him stop, he couldn't tell why, and he took two or three steps towards the spring and then stood perfectly still. After hesitating a moment, more in doubt than fear, though perchance not entirely without some approach to the latter feeling, he made up his mind to address the being whom he saw before him, and accordingly, raising his voice, he exclaimed, "What ho! my master, sleepest thou by the spring this fine morning?"

The old man slowly raised his head, and disclosed features which Blechynden never remembered to have seen before; an aquiline nose, high cheek-bones, lofty forehead, and eyes of a piercing brightness. He gazed at the intruder upon his dreams for a moment, and then replied haughtily, "Who art thou, who inquirest after my doings?"

"Ha!" returned Nicholas, roused to wrath by this somewhat uncivil reception of his advances. "Canst thou not brook a question, Master High and Mighty? I would have thee learn to give a civil answer, or perchance thou wilt be taught after a rough fashion to mend thy manners!"

The old man smiled grimly. "Thou art hasty, good Master Blechynden. Hot and hasty, like all thy race."

Nicholas took a step backwards. "How knowest thou my name?" he asked, "for, by my faith, I have never set eyes on thee before!"

"Dost thou think so?" returned the other. "Yet many a time and oft have I seen thee. I know the history of thy past life. I know thy present errand, to visit burly Jack Hayward, the butcher of Ashford, on the matter of those oxen of thine; and, perchance, I could tell thee something of thy future."

Nicholas stepped back still further. "An thou knowest so much," he said, "thou must have dealings with strange folk. But how of my future? Tell me, master, for I would fain know, how matters shall prosper with me and mine!"

Even whilst he was speaking, he saw that the old man had risen from his seat and stood at his full height, and as Blechynden ceased, he waved his right arm slowly in the air, and uttered the following words:—

"Who feigns a right to interfere
With Bockhanger's protected deer?
Beware, thou man of ancient name,
Beware of an unlawful claim.
Yet better is thy right, I wot,
Than that of interloping Scot.
Of whom be also ware, and know
Thou hast an unrelenting foe.
And tho' the chase may have its charms
Hunt not without thy men-at-arms!"

And having spoken thus, without another syllable, the old man deliberately leapt into the pond by which he stood. With a shout of alarm, Nicholas Blechynden rushed to the bank. There was a large circle, round the spot where the old man had sunk, and the water was disturbed just as if a heavy body had plunged into it, yet was there no sign of struggling, and the surface of the pond gradually settled down to its usual

stillness, even whilst the wonder-struck Nicholas stood gazing by its side. For a full minute he remained, rooted to the spot with amazement, and then he cried out loudly for help. No one, however, was near, and he was meditating a dive into the water on his own account, to see whether he could recover the body of the drowned man, when suddenly he heard a laugh from the other side of the pond, and casting his eyes across, he perceived, with mingled terror and surprise, a stout thickset pony, upon which sat either the same old man whom he had seen jump into the water, or his exact image and counterpart, who waved his hand gaily to the astonished Blechynden as he trotted off, and was soon buried in the dark shades of Bockhanger wood.

Then Nicholas thought he understood the matter. "By St. Thomas of Canterbury!" cried he, "I have seen the Wizard. Well, he means me no ill, or he had never warned me against the Baliol. An *that* be the Wizard, I mislike him not; and, anyhow, no cold bath for me, to save a man who can save himself after that fashion." So saying, he turned from the water-side, shouldered his staff, and soon left Quillett's Pond and the Wizard's Oak behind him.

Yet, as Nicholas Blechynden pursued his journey to Ashford, it may well be imagined that he pondered deeply over his strange interview with the Wizard of Bockhanger, for it was plain enough that the old man whom he had encountered could be none other than this mysterious individual. Nicholas, however, having experienced no harm at his hands, and being rather pleased than otherwise at the advice which he had received, continued his walk, finished his business, re-

turned home again without any other remarkable occurrence, and went to bed that night in no bad humour either with himself or the Wizard. In fact, the master of Quarrington was not a man to be easily put out of his way. The head of one of the oldest Saxon families in Kent, he had inherited a full share of Saxon coolness and courage, in days when such qualities were highly valued among men. He dwelt in the ancient Manor-house of Quarrington, and owned the extensive manor of that name, situate upon the north-west side of Mersham Hatch. Although not one of the great nobles of his day, he was still among the most powerful of the lay proprietors in that part of Kent, the Knatchbull property being then comparatively small, and John de Baliol's family not having as yet gathered around them the vast estates which were afterwards attached to their mansion at Scott's Hall. And although Blechynden's habits of life were simple, and he made no great display, he was looked upon with respect as one of gentle birth and withal not ill to do as far as this world's wealth was concerned. Moreover, he stood well with his neighbours generally, although he was on no friendly terms with De Baliol, whom he looked upon as an intruding Scotchman, whose family had no business to have settled in the south country, to which they had come from the North some hundred years before the time at which our story begins. So it was that the advice of the Wizard sounded pleasantly in his ears, and although he had no intention of attacking De Baliol, he determined to bear in mind the words he had heard, and be on his guard against the enmity of the latter.

Not many days after the events of which I have told you, several rustics were sitting upon the green, opposite the "Farriers' Arms," discussing huge flagons of ale and talking over their own and their neighbours' affairs. Foremost amongst these were three noted men among the deer: Dennis, Waters, and Head, who knew their way about Bockhanger better than they ought, and with whom Blechynden's or De Baliol's men would have made short work if they had caught them. Here, however, on "the Forestall," and among their cronies, the men were safe enough, and over their ale they were boasting of their brave deeds among the Bockhanger thickets, and the fat bucks which they had slain.

"I' faith," said Waters at last, "the good monks of Canterbury may call the chase their own, but methinks my mates here and I have more from it than their reverences," and he chuckled aloud.

"'Tis likely, 'tis likely," answered several voices.

But one old man, Swinerd by name, who had attained a great age and was much respected among the simple villagers, shook his head gravely, and muttered, half to himself and half to the company, "Small gain comes of such boasting. I like it not; I like it not; the pitcher that goes oft to the well gets broken at last, and such may be thy fate, my fine youngster."

"What, Father Swinerd," cried Waters, "art croaking again? Nought hurts the bold, and what should harm me and my mates? No, no, we will hunt in merry Bockhanger as long as we list, and neither monk nor man-at-arms shall harm us."

Still old Swinerd shook his head, and being thus

directly addressed by Waters, he replied in a louder tone, "Thou mayst be harmed by neither monk nor man-at-arms, though thou hast both for thy foes, but yet thou art scarce secure—more dangerous powers may be in thy path, and thou wouldest do well to remember the Wizard of Bockhanger!"

"A fig for thee and thy Wizard!" shouted Waters boldly; "why, I would meet him myself, man to man, and it would go hard but that I cudgelled the old chap well an he interfered with me!"

As he spoke a low murmur ran through the party, expressive of admiration of Waters's valour, not unmixed with fear at his light and boastful manner of speaking of one so dreaded as the Wizard of Bockhanger; and immediately afterwards a voice was heard to say, "Is that thy challenge, Master Waters? Now would I wager thee a round sum that thou comest off but second best if thou meetest the Wizard!"

Waters looked round to the side from whence the voice came, and perceived a middle-aged rustic, clad in the ordinary garments of the day, sitting on the outside of the ring into which the company had formed themselves, with a large flagon of ale before him.

"And who be'st thou, who wagerest thus freely?" he asked.

"What!" returned the other; "not know Funnell of Woodchurch? Come, gossip Waters, lay me thy wager at once and back thine opinion!"

Now neither Waters, nor anyone else there present, knew Funnell of Woodchurch, forasmuch as Woodchurch was nigh to ten miles from Mersham, and in

those days few men travelled ten or even five miles from their own parish. Nevertheless, then as now, men liked not to appear ignorant of what some one else seemed to suppose they ought to know, wherefore Waters answered at once as if he knew the man.

"Well, Funnell," he replied, "I can wager thee no large sum, for I have it not, but for all that I shrink not from man nor mule, witch nor wizard, as the saying goes."

"Well crowed, Bully Waters," answered Funnell, "then will I treat thee better than thou deservest for thy boasting. Take thou this scarf, and wear it until the Wizard of Bockhanger take it from thee in fair fight!"

So saying, he drew from his pocket a knitted scarf, and throwing it across to Waters, rose and quitted the party. Waters took the scarf and laughingly declared that he should wear it until it was worn out, and what a fool was Funnell for giving it to him. Then the men fell to talking of this Funnell, and when it turned out that none of them knew him, there was some misgiving and questioning among them upon the subject.

Waters, however, thought no more of the matter, and the very next day went with his two companions upon a foraging expedition into Bockhanger wood. But well as they knew the place, they somehow got separated, and Waters found himself standing alone in the open space between Bockhanger and Spring woods, not knowing in which direction his friends might be. Suddenly a little man, scarce four feet high, swung himself from the branch of a neighbouring oak tree, and descended right in front of the Mersham hero.

"What ho! Waters of Mersham! is that you, my fine fellow? No trespassers allowed here!"

Waters turned upon the little man with an air of surprise, and then, swinging his staff in his hand, replied to him in a careless tone,—

"I know nothing of thee and thy trespassers, man; what wouldest thou with me?"

"A round, a round, a merry round at singlestick!" cried the dwarf, as he, too, twirled round his head a staff as tall as himself, and began to dance round Waters in a menacing manner.

"Be off with you, then, and go fight the boys," said the poacher in a contemptuous tone, but the words were scarce out of his mouth when thwack came the dwarf's stick down upon his head with a force he could never have believed possible from so small a being.

Thoroughly roused by the pain and indignation which he felt, Waters dealt a furious blow at the little man, which the latter parried with his staff, and returned him a crack on the left arm, which well nigh rendered it useless. At it they went, hammer and tongs, but the issue was never for a moment doubtful. The blood streamed down Waters's face from repeated blows upon the head; his arms, legs, and body were covered with bruises, and in fact he received as good a licking as ever fell to the lot of man or boy in this world; whilst the little man hopped about as briskly as ever, either not touched at all, or so little hurt by any blows which he had received that they made no difference at all to him. At last Waters, fairly beaten, sank upon the earth and roared for mercy.

At this the little man burst into a loud fit of

laughter: "The scarf, the scarf!" he cried; "give up the scarf, you rogue, and remember Funnell of Woodchurch!"

And as the astonished Waters rubbed his eyes, and scarcely believed either them or his ears, the dwarf seized the scarf (which he was wearing according to promise), lugged it off his neck, and danced merrily off into the forest, only stopping for one moment to look back and shout to his discomfited antagonist—

"Now how about beating the Wizard of Bockhanger?"

At that instant Dennis and Head appeared on the scene, and much astonished were they to find the sorry condition in which their companion had been left. But when they heard what had happened, they at once determined that Funnell of Woodchurch, the dwarf, and the terrible Wizard were all three one and the same person, and, flying in terror from the wood, they determined that thenceforward that part of Bockhanger should never be entered by them.

This, however, was only one deed among many by which this extraordinary being showed his power.

Old Bokham of the Mill below Quillett's Pond was a noted miser. One day, as he was sitting counting his treasures alone before his kitchen fire, a strange, rumbling sound in the large chimney attracted his attention, and almost before he knew where he was, a large black cat came tumbling down right before him. Scarcely had she reached the floor when she sat bolt upright and "miawed" three times. At the first "miaw" her fore-legs became the arms and her hind-legs the legs of a man. At the second appeared a body, to which the arms and legs fitted themselves as completely

as possible; and at the third "miaw" the head of a grave-looking individual, with a terrible squint, appeared in the proper place upon the body. The astonished Bokham stared, open-mouthed, at the vision, unable from fright either to speak or stir. Then the stranger solemnly wagged his head to and fro, and thus accosted him :—

"Friend Bokham, thou art too fond of thy money, and lest evil come of it, I will give thee less to be anxious about."

With these words, taking a brand from the fire, he slowly passed it over the miser's treasure, and immediately every one of the pieces of money before him turned into a frog or toad, and began to hop about the kitchen floor. At this sight, so dreadful to his dearest and most cherished hopes, poor Bokham gave a loud shriek and sank senseless upon the ground. When he had recovered from his swoon, he found his strange visitor gone, and with him, alas! much of his hoarded wealth.

This was the miser's account; but there were not wanting those who asserted that the whole was either a dream, the effect of strong liquor (in which old Bokham loved to indulge), or else an invention of the wily old miser, who wished it to be supposed that, somehow or other, he had been robbed of much of the wealth which he was known to have gained, and so had again become a comparatively poor man, not worth robbing. I see no reason, however, for doubting that the hand of the wizard was here, as in the other strange events which occurred at the period of which I write.

As time passed on, and the season for hunting arrived, it happened that some travelling friars repre-

sented to the monks of Canterbury the number and extent of the depredations which were committed upon their property by various people under various pretences. Thus it came to their knowledge that, whilst Nicholas Blechynden and John de Baliol occasionally sent a present to the holy Fathers, they hunted much more frequently on their own account, and that as their mutual jealousy caused them to look after each other rather than after any one else, the Mersham poachers had rather increased in boldness than otherwise.

And so it came to pass that the good monks determined that it was high time that some of their own body should visit their rich manor of Mersham and the wood of Bockhanger, with the view of inquiring into the state of affairs, and, if possible, of finding out the truth for themselves. Accordingly, three worthy monks, Father Anselm, Father Hubert, and Father Gregory, were deputed by their Prior to go forth on this expedition. Each rode a quiet, well-conditioned mule, and six serving-men accompanied them, partly as a guard in case of danger, and partly to attend to the wants of the pious men at the various country inns at which they might have to tarry. For they came not across by the shortest way from Canterbury, which would have been either by the valley of the Stour to the pleasant town of Wye, and then by the cross roads to Naccult, Quarrington, and Bokham Mill, or else by the Stone-street Road until they had passed the Half-way house and reached the turning to Brabourne Down, and so to Brabourne Street and Leese, skirting the edge of the forest and passing through Smeeth to Mersham. But they journeyed

first to Chilham, where the then lord of the castle doubtless entertained them as befitted a good churchman, and thence to Ashford, where that ancient hostelry, the "Saracen's Head," founded in the reign of Richard the First by an ardent Crusader, even then afforded good accommodation for man and beast. Here the holy Fathers rested, having perchance business in the town, and on the following day set forth for Mersham, so arranging their journey that they should pass through a part of Bockhanger wood and see for themselves, so far as they could, the state of their deer-forest.

It was a fine November's afternoon, as the three jogged quietly along side by side. Father Gregory, the eldest and most important personage of the three, was a tall, dark-visaged monk, whose appearance told of many a fast and midnight vigil. Father Anselm was a short man, the round plumpness of whose frame betokened a different and more convivial life; whilst Father Hubert, the youngest of the three, did not seem to have found his cloister existence diminish aught of the strength of his youthful and vigorous constitution. There was no regular road, but a rough kind of track which led from the main Ashford road through the upper part of the old wood, and into this the three monks and their attendants turned, intending, after passing through the wood, to take up their abode for the night at The Hatch, where they were sure of safe shelter and good food from that stout son of the Church, Thomas Knatchbull. For, as they well knew, the Knatchbulls were ever staunch churchmen, and it was from Thomas that they hoped to get some information as to the true state of the case as regarded

their deer-forest, with which none of the family or retainers of Hatch would ever meddle so long as it was owned by the monks of Canterbury.

They were bound, then, to the house of this friend, and rode with light hearts and cheerful spirits into the leafy shades of Bockhanger. Not far, however, had they proceeded, when their attention was attracted to an individual who was seated upon the outspreading roots of a huge old beech tree, which stood close to the track. He was a man apparently about middle age, and clad in a herdsman's garment; nor was there anything remarkable about him, save that the place was a strange one for him to be sitting down in, and moreover he seemed to be weeping bitterly.

"What aileth thee, brother?" asked Father Gregory as they approached the sorrowing man; "what aileth thee, that thou weepest by the wayside?"

"Alas and alackaday," replied the poor man, "I weep, Reverend Father, because I have been guilty of many sins, and to this lonesome place have I hied me to repent and bewail them;" and hereupon he burst out into a fresh series of cries and groans, which made the good Fathers believe that he must indeed have been a grievous sinner.

"Nay, brother," chimed in cheery Father Anselm, "an thou repentest so truly, thy sins shall not trouble thee long. But of what hast thou been guilty that thy crimes strike thee with so much remorse?"

"Father," said the penitent, "I was a baker in Mersham, and daily did I cheat the poor with short measure, whilst I filled my purse with their hard-earned wages."

"Thou hast done wrong, my son," answered Father

Gregory gravely. "Nevertheless shall thy sin sit lightly upon thee, if thou bestow a portion of thy gains towards the building of the new wing of our monastery at St. Augustine's."

"It shall be done, Father, it shall be done; but there is more still to come! I have been employed to collect money for the poor widows of the parish, and some of this have I taken for myself, and rendered a false account to those that sent me."

"Bad indeed, my son, bad indeed; yet shalt this also be forgiven, if thou pay over to us for our sick brethren at Canterbury the money thou hast thus unlawfully taken."

"Still there is more, Father, still there is more. I had to bring up two orphan boys, children of a dead sister of mine, who left them some money. I half-starved the lads, till they ran away from me altogether, and I have kept the money for mine own use."

"A sinner indeed art thou," returned the monk, "yet not such but what thou mayst escape, if thou expendest that money in an offering at the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury, of which I will myself take charge."

"And, father," said the penitent once more, "there is yet a crime to tell thee of. Last Thursday was eight days since with my cross-bow I shot a noble buck, as fat a beast as ere you saw, in this good wood of Bockhanger — oh! even now I seem to taste his splendid haunch!"

"What is this that I hear?" shouted the enraged monk at the top of his voice. "Hast thou robbed Mother Church, then? Oh, thou vile traitor, thou scum of the earth! Thou art doubtless one of those poachers

of whose doings we have heard so much! Thou shalt find that the Church hath a long arm, villain, and verily thou shalt be strung from the nearest oak, thief and robber as thou art! Seize him, knaves, seize the rogue at once!" and Father Gregory shouted to the serving-men, whilst he spurred on his own mule towards the spot where the stranger sat.

But now occurred a new and marvellous thing. Not one of the mules would stir a single step! They stiffened their legs, they pricked up their ears as far as they possibly could, they trembled mightily, but they moved not, and Father Gregory shouted in vain. But stranger still was that which happened to the poor penitent. Rising from his seat, and casting his garment from him, he stood forth in the middle of the track, an old man of grave and reverend appearance, whose flowing beard, keen eyes, and grey cloak, suggested at once to his frightened audience that they were in the fearsome presence of the Wizard of Bockhanger.

"What!" he exclaimed in a loud and jeering tone, "is it thus that the good monks of Canterbury read law and justice? Forsooth, I may plunder the poor, rob the widow, and evil entreat the orphan, and yet, if I give of my ill-gotten gains to the overflowing coffers of the fat churchmen at Canterbury, I may go scathless! But, touch a buck that feeds on monkish pastures, and couches in monkish wood, and alas! my life is forfeit! But not yet, my masters, not yet is this the law of Bockhanger. How now? Look to yourselves!"

As he spoke he waved in the air a staff which he held in his hand, and in an instant the whole number of mules began kicking and plunging in a

manner which rendered it difficult for either priests or laymen to keep their seats.

"Sit tight, holy men, sit tight!" shouted the Wizard, whilst the mules redoubled their antics, and after a few seconds, during which their riders struggled vainly to master them, they turned round and ran wildly away through the wood at the top of their speed. As they fled, the monks fancied that they heard the loud laughter of the Wizard ringing in their ears, but they had no time to listen, for their beasts dashed through brakes and briars like mad creatures, tearing and scratching their unhappy masters as they had never been scratched and torn before. At last Father Anselm's mule stumbled, and threw him over her head into a soft, muddy place, into which he alighted with sufficient force to have stunned him had the ground been hard. As it was, however, he recovered himself at once, and sitting up, gazed ruefully around him. Splashed, nay smeared with mud from head to foot, and with scratches of an unbecoming nature upon face and hands, he cut a sorry figure indeed, compared with the plump and jovial-faced Father Anselm who had entered the wood some half an hour before. Fortunately for him, one of the serving-men, though in little better condition than himself, caught and brought to him his now pacified mule, and they regained the track together. The first thing the good Father espied in his path was poor Father Hubert, scratched and torn even worse than himself, and with scarce a vestige of clothing left upon him by the thorns and brambles through which he had been carried.

But where was Father Gregory? They scarce dared stay to look, but were full of gloomy thoughts

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and fears concerning his fate, when of a sudden, the Father rode out of the wood close to them. But, oh! what a condition was he in! Not only as bad as themselves in the matter of scratches, but bending in his saddle with pain, as he declared that he had been pursued the whole way by some one, who had continually belaboured him with a stick or whip, until his whole back was covered with bruises. Marks and bruises there certainly were upon the good man, just as if something had occurred such as he described, and terror and amazement filled the hearts of his brother monks, when they heard and saw what had happened. No journey to Hatch that night! Poachers were bad enough, but wizards were worse, and although their desire to fulfil their mission was great, greater was their longing to get clear away from the scene of their misfortune, and to turn their back upon Bockhanger. They pushed forward, therefore, to the Ashford road, and when there, made their mules pay for their past bad conduct by carrying them at best pace back to the "Saracen's Head."

The host was somewhat surprised at their return, but by no means sorry, and did his best to make them as comfortable as could be under the circumstances. It was long, however, before the worthy monks were themselves again. Father Gregory moaned and groaned as if still under the lash. Father Hubert maintained a most woe-begone expression of countenance; whilst Father Anselm, though he comforted himself with a goodly portion of sack posset, declared that he had never felt so like a jelly before, and that the monastery might want its new wing for ever and a day before he should be prevailed upon to set foot again in Bockhanger wood.

Now when it became noised abroad that the monks of Canterbury had come and gone—albeit the real truth was not known till long afterwards, but another story set about, for the good Fathers would not have it said that they had been worsted by a wizard—but when their arrival and departure had become known, bolder than ever grew the poachers, and more secure grew both Master Blechynden and De Baliol in their sport. It was not possible, however, for these two to hunt over the same ground without falling out. Indeed, had they both hunted constantly, game would soon have become scarce, and before long each let it be understood that the followers of the other had no right in Bockhanger, and, if caught there, would be treated as poachers. Thomas Knatchbull, who had, as I have said, wished to protect the property of the Church, finding that the monks came not, and that it was necessary that some authority should exist in the Chase, sided with Blechynden, as having the better claim, from longer standing in the county, and close residence to the forest, though for the matter of that there was little difference between the two. On the other hand, De Baliol had his supporters. Pashley of Evegate was entirely with him, whilst De Poynings of Westenhanger and De Laurence of Somerfield also upheld his claims. It was evident that the result of all this would some day be serious; but still there was nobody to interfere, and each gentleman did what he deemed best.

About this time it occurred to the owner of Scott's Hall, who, like all his countrymen of that day, was somewhat superstitious, that if the accounts of the power of the Wizard of Bockhanger were true, it

might be well to obtain his aid in order once for all to establish his own position in the county, and to overawe those who murmured against him as a Scotchman and a new-comer. One day, therefore, attended only by his favourite groom, he mounted his iron-grey charger and rode off with the determination of seeking the far-famed Wizard. Scarcely, however, had he quitted his hall door, when he was encountered by two horsemen, in whom he recognized his friends and allies, the owners of Somerfield and Westenhanger. Having learned the object of De Baliol's ride, the two gentlemen offered to accompany him, and the three rode off together. Not wishing to pass through Blechynden's land, they avoided the shortest way to the Wizard's Oak, which would have been to the north side of that which is now Hatch Park, through Bircholt and Quarrington to Bokham Mill, and chose instead thereof the longer road to the south of Mersham Hatch, and so passing Bockhanger as far as its Western outskirts, then entered the wood and, turning northwards, rode slowly by the side of the green pastures in the direction of Quillett's Pond.

At the very edge of the wood De Baliol's horse started at the figure of an aged woman standing still, close to a venerable oak. Uttering an exclamation of impatience, he was about to pass on, when the old creature raised her voice and addressed him in these words:—

"Sir Knight, I have left my bundle and my bit of victuals therein by the beech-tree yonder, and I fear me some dog may take it whilst I gather sticks here. I pray thee ride back and fetch it me!"

"What!" said the proud noble (for such indeed he

was by birth), "the best blood in Scotland stoop to become carrier for a miserable Saxon peasant! The Saints punish thine impudence!" And loud in derision laughed De Laurence and De Poynings.

"A nice request indeed! Who ever saw belted knight or squire do the behest of a peasant hag? Thinkest thou there is ever an one who would do what thou askest, thou bold hussey?"

In some such words as these did De Baliol's two companions gibe at the old woman, who shook her head sadly, whilst she mournfully exclaimed, "Is there no one, then, who will fetch me my bundle?"

"That, marry, will I, Dame!" cried a cheerful voice at that moment, and out of the wood rode a middle-aged, fair-complexioned man, of tall and vigorous frame, mounted upon a sturdy cob.

"No shame to help the old and weak, and never did a Knatchbull blush to do so," he added; and trotting off to the tree to which the old woman had pointed, he alighted, picked up the bundle, rode back again, and delivered it to its owner.

"Well done, Master Knatchbull," jeeringly cried De Baliol, "those who have no dignity know not how to keep it."

"Nay," replied the person to whom he spoke, "say rather, that those who stand always upon their dignity are more apt to lose it than those who leave others to learn and respect it from their acts."

"How meanest thou, sirrah?" said De Baliol angrily.

"Sirrah me no sirrahs," replied the other. "The wood is as free to me as to thee and thine, Sir Scot, and I may do an act of kindness to my neighbours without thy questioning!"

At this John De Baliol flared up in a rage. "Thou art malapert, Master Knatchbull," cried he, "and I would bid thee have a care lest thou and I fall out."

He was about to say more, when his attention and that of his companions was arrested by an extraordinary occurrence. Taking advantage of the discussion between the gentlemen, the old woman had apparently disappeared, for she was no longer to be seen, nor indeed was it any sight or vision of an old woman or anything else which interrupted the Baliol's speech. But from the old oak, as it seemed, by which the dame had been standing, a deep voice uttered the following words:—

> "Why wrangle here, ill-mannered folk,
> 'Mid Bockhanger's romantic shade?
> Sir Scot, thou know'st the Wizard's Oak,
> To seek it is thine heart afraid?
> Then hither let the Baliol bide
> And hear true words to tame his pride!"

At this unexpected sound the four gentlemen all turned to the tree, and looked eagerly to see from whom the voice proceeded. Nought, however, was to be seen, and for an instant all remained silent with amazement. Then John de Baliol flushed with anger, for he was a man of hasty temper, and he laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword as he spoke out boldly. "What juggling trick is this?" he said. "Who dares to say that the heart of a true Baliol fears either oak or Wizard? Yet would I fain see the prophet before I hear the prophecy. Come forth, Sir Man of the Oak; come forth, and let us see what thou art made of, if man thou art at all, for perchance it is but our old hag, Master Knatchbull's friend;"

and with a sneer he spurred his horse up towards the tree.

But he rode round it without seeing anything, and returning to his companions was about to speak again, when the same voice continued :—

> "To see, Sir Scot, is to believe,
> And doubtless is the Baliol brave ;
> Yet let not bravery deceive,
> Or think the Doom of Fate to save."

"A fig for thee and thy Doom!" cried De Baliol, and turning to his friends, "What think ye, fair sirs?" he said, "shall we tarry and hear this tree-speaking marvel, or wend our way forward as we were bent?"

"Truly," said the master of Westenhanger, with a laugh, but at the same time glancing uneasily at the tree, for, like most men of his time, and like ignorant men of *all* time, he feared that which he understood not;—"truly I like not these magic sounds; there is magic or trickery here, I wot, yet let us see the end of it, and never be scared by the creaking of an old oak."

"Yes," said he of Somerfield. "Shameful tale it were to tell that three gentlemen were frightened by an old witch hid in a tree, for that is how I read the riddle, and our old peasant hag is doubtless concealed hard by. How sayest thou, Master Knatchbull? Is this one of thy tricks, and the dame one hired to frighten thy neighbours?"

Thomas Knatchbull, whose horse was standing at a little distance from the others, shook his head gravely at this appeal. "Sirs," said he, "I love not to jest on such matters. This wood belongeth to the holy monks of Canterbury, and there may well be here things of deep and hidden mystery, such as common minds

and the hearts of simple laymen may not understand. I listen, but not to jeer, for who knows the eyes that see and the ears that hear us at this moment?"

So spake the lord of Mersham Hatch, and even as he finished his words, came again that low, deep voice from the ancient oak—

"The branch must fall, by whomsoe'er 'tis broken,
Fate's Doom is Doom, by whomsoever spoken,
I read Fate's Book, and find within its pages
These words—to be fulfilled in coming ages."

And then, in a louder, clearer, but still deep voice, rang out from the oak the following words:—

"Scott's Hall—shall have a fall,
Westenhanger—was built in anger,
Somerfield—at length shall yield,
And Mersham Hatch—shall win the match."

Scarcely were the words uttered than John de Baliol broke forth again in fury: "Said I not so, gossips?" he shouted; "these are the words of the hag who thinketh to please her friend Master Knatchbull by these idle prophecies of success to his house at our expense! Verily, if I can find her I will make an example of her!"

With these words both he and his two friends rode forward again, and approached the tree. As they did so, however, a mocking laugh greeted their ears, which gradually died away as if the laughter were retiring into the wood. Round and round the tree they rode, and, as it was nearly hollow, made sure they could discover anyone who might be concealed there. No one, however, was to be seen, and the affair seemed wrapped in mystery.

"I' faith, Master Knatchbull," said De Poynings, who was far from a churl at heart, and cherished no ill feeling towards his neighbour. "An the tree's words be true, I grudge thee not thy good fortune, but trust that if mine House be built in anger, the passion may cool down and the old place flourish in kindness yet."

"Ay," said De Laurence, "and if Somerfield is to yield at length, long and tough shall be the struggle first, I warrant ye."

"By St. Andrew!" cried John De Baliol, "ye do well to heed the prating nonsense of some idle jester, who has hid himself among these thickets. Mine House can take care of itself, and I fear neither prophet nor prophecy. But for thee, Master Knatchbull, look to it if thou hast played us a trick. Well and neighbourly would I be with all, but I like not such doings, and moreover, now I have the chance, let me tell thee to beware of a dangerous path. Methinks thou art too closely leagued with that knave Nicholas Blechynden; take care that if he and I come to blows, thy head be clear of the cudgelling!"

"No knave is Nicholas," quoth sturdy Thomas Knatchbull in answer, "but a right good neighbour and true friend; and my head, an it come to blows, can take, as my arm can give, as hard clouts as another. Nevertheless, I have no grudge against thee, De Baliol, nor against these gentlemen either, and I seek nothing at their cost. There is room enough in the good county of Kent for all our Houses to flourish, and so may it be!"

With this speech he turned his steed round, and with a courteous salute cantered back to the wood-track which would conduct him homewards. The

other three rode somewhat moodily down to Quillett's, but all there was still as death. No Wizard was to be seen, no oracle gave forth its utterances from the oak, and they found that they must fain be content with the prophecy they had heard, or go without any at all for that day at least.

Thomas Knatchbull, meanwhile, rode gaily through the wood, though as he did so he could not help meditating upon what had passed. He had simply performed an act of kindness, according to the prompting of a good heart, and had been rewarded by a prophecy which was calculated to awaken within his breast ambitious hopes for the future of his House. Yet it was as strange to him as to the other three that the voice should have come from the oak, and the more he thought of it the more puzzled he became. As he rode and meditated, he reached that part of the wood where now the trees cease and the green turf of the Horse Park replaces the dried leaves and moss under the feet of the traveller. The trees were even at that time somewhat more scanty than in other parts of the Forest, and the sun streamed down upon sundry open spaces of grass and gorse; and there, on a patch of green, stood a Forester, leaning upon his bow and apparently in a deep dream. As the owner of Hatch rode up, however, he lifted his head. Thomas Knatchbull was somewhat surprised at the sight of such a person, and shook his hand at him gaily as he passed, saying in a kindly tone, "I fear me, friend, thou art one of those who make free with the good monks' deer! It is no matter of mine, but have a care thou fall not into evil ways, and have thy bow broken and thy coat stript from

thy back by those who have the authority to guard the Chase!"

Whilst speaking, he had ridden a few paces past the Forester, when the latter exclaimed—"Stay, sir, I would fain have a word with thee, an thou wilt."

"With me?" replied the other; "and what hast thou for mine ear, Sir Archer?"

"That," said the Forester, "which thou wilt do well to hear, and see that thou despise not, for remember, that though the lion was strong and large, and the mouse feeble and little, yet did the latter save the forest king, and so may a poor man save a great."

"Beshrew thy riddles," cried Knatchbull, "they suit not a plain man's ear; but a warning is a warning, come it from whence it may, and I promise nought till I hear the why and wherefore."

"Listen, then," said the other. "Nicholas Blechynden will ask thee to hunt next week. Go not thou with him, for trouble is at hand, and hard blows will be plentiful. An thou wouldst help Nicholas, the Heron Pond towards the afternoon, will be the spot where aid will be wanted."

"Ha!" cried his astonished hearer. "By my halidome! thou holdest strange talk! How knowest thou, who art at best but a simple yeoman, of the doings and intentions of gentlemen and squires? Say, is this a message, and who charged thee therewith? I would fain know more of thee and thy news," and as he spoke, he turned his horse round and retraced his steps towards the Forester. But the latter slowly withdrew as he advanced, and, stepping behind a stately elm, disappeared in the tangled thicket, waving his hand as he passed from sight, and uttering as his last

words the renewed caution, "Beware, and remember the warning!"

Thomas Knatchbull spurred up close to the elm, but pursuit was hopeless, and as he gazed on the thicket, through which his strange friend had vanished, he heard a low laugh dying away in the distance as if his efforts to follow were derided. For the life of him he could not understand the matter, but that there was something of magic in it he never doubted, and long and gravely did he ponder upon the whole of that day's adventures. His wonder, however, was increased when he reached his house, for the first thing which greeted him was a message from Nicholas Blechynden, inviting him to join in the chase of the deer upon that day week. It seemed to him that this proved beyond doubt that the hand of magic had been at work. How could a mere forester know the plans of the Blechynden? and if he *did* know them, how could he think that hard blows would result from a day's hunting, and that the Heron Pond would be the place at which Nicholas would want aid? But Knatchbull was a cautious man, and one who thought over matters well before he acted, and after some consideration, he came to the conclusion that it would be better not to join the hunt. True, it might have been only a guess of the forester's, but if one guess was right, why not another? Baliol was no friend to Blechynden, and from him might come hard blows at any time. Moreover, the prophecy of the oak savoured strangely of the magic art, and putting two and two together, it was not impossible that the good feeling of both the prophet and the forester towards himself and his house might be the feeling of one and the

same person, and that all might spring from the wondrous power and knowledge of the Wizard of Bockhanger. So he sent off early the next morning to excuse himself from accepting Blechynden's invitation, and determined to think no more about the matter until the day arrived, and then merely to hold himself in readiness should occasion require him to take action.

Meanwhile, after leaving Quillett's Pond, John de Baliol and his companions had ridden home in a somewhat moody and disappointed state of mind. They had obtained nothing from the Wizard, unless (which they were unwilling to believe) the unpleasant prophecy which they had heard proceeded from that mighty person. From whomsoever it came, it was somewhat disagreeable, and had a visible effect upon their spirits and conversation. They parted company at Scott's Hall gate, and the other two gentlemen rode off to their respective mansions.

Baliol, meanwhile, brooded over the events of the day in no contented spirit, and after a heavy supper and restless night, the next morning found him in an irritable and excited mood. This was aggravated, moreover, by news which was brought to him that, in defiance of him and his power, Nicholas Blechynden had planned a deer-hunt in Bockhanger, upon an extensive scale, for some day in the following week. Indignant beyond measure, the lord of Scott's Hall vowed that he would once for all put a stop to such proceedings, and resolved to take measures accordingly. He sent messages forthwith to De Poynings, De Laurence, and Pashley, asking them to join him, as he said, in protecting his own rights and the

property of the monastery. He proposed that the three should come up the next day to Scott's Hall, there to take counsel together as to the best plan of action ; and meanwhile he directed Dick Fleming, his steward, to summon and keep in readiness all of his retainers who were able to bear arms. His three friends readily responded to his summons, and the four gentlemen held a long conference together. It was scarcely doubtful that their united forces would be able to overpower any which Blechynden could bring into the field, even though Thomas Knatchbull —as Baliol feared—might be induced to come to his assistance, for, taken by surprise, as he would probably be, he would have no time to seek for other allies. But here arose an unexpected difficulty. Pashley would follow De Baliol as readily as a hound follows his master, and his forty or fifty retainers would be at hand whenever wanted ; De Laurence also was persuaded without much difficulty to promise his aid with the seventy or eighty men who followed his banner. But De Poynings was a man of a different stamp. Of higher position and greater power by far than either of the others (for his estates at Ostenhanger and Westenhanger formed only part of his patrimony, and he could on emergency have raised several hundred men), he was also a man less ready than they either to follow De Baliol without good cause assigned, or to join in a quarrel which might easily swell into something akin to a civil war, and draw down upon the neighbourhood the interference of higher powers. For, though the times were disturbed, and the king held the reins of power too loosely to be enabled to keep his fierce barons and

knights in good order, yet such a quarrel as that which Baliol appeared to project might reach to London, and compel the action of the Court.

John de Baliol was a good hater, and he desired to overthrow the owner of Quarrington in such fashion as to deprive him of life and lands, and to divide the latter among his allies; and as Blechynden had many friends, and was a stout warrior to boot, this could not be effected without blood spilt on either side. So De Poynings advised against an appeal to arms: the matter, he said, might be referred to the monks themselves, the owners of the property, or some neighbour might be called in to settle the respective claims of the two gentlemen; but as for battle, he would have none of it. De Baliol tried hard to win him over, but De Poynings was firm, and when he was outvoted by the other three, withdrew from the conference, promising only to take no steps to acquaint Blechynden with what was going on, and not to interfere on his behalf. It therefore rested with the other three gentlemen to carry out the plans of Dê Baliol, who, although much disappointed at De Poynings' refusal, knew that the latter was too powerful a man to offend, and therefore let him go without further remonstrance. Still, he would not be balked of his vengeance, and determined to urge forward every preparation without delay. He calculated on being able to bring into the field some two hundred men, which, joined to those supplied by De Laurence and Pashley, would give a force of upwards of three hundred, with which he had little doubt that he should be able to overwhelm any number which it might be possible for Blechynden to bring into the field, even

though he should be warned in time to change his simple hunting-party into one of a more warlike character.

All this time the owner of Quarrington had little thought of the intentions and hostile preparations of his powerful neighbour. He had a kind of stubborn determination within him which prompted him to resist the hunting claims of De Baliol, even though his own were no better; but he never imagined that their dispute would amount to more than an occasional brawl between their followers, and was under no apprehension of any such attack as that intended by the lord of Scott's Hall. He had therefore planned his day's hunting, and invited his friends after his usual fashion; nor can there be any doubt that he would have been entirely taken by surprise but for the incident which I am about to relate.

Nicholas Blechynden had one only daughter, whom he loved as the very apple of his eye; nor was his affection undeserved, for Mistress Alice Blechynden was one of the best as well as the loveliest girls in East Kent. She was tall and fair—very fair—with a pair of clear, bright eyes, which rivalled the blue of the heavens above, and spoke of heaven's purity and truth in every glance. Her swan-like neck was a thing scarce to be matched, and the beauty of her complexion and queenly grace of her every movement were only equalled by the sweetness of her voice and the winning kindliness of her disposition. No marvel, then, that such a daughter was the hope and pride of Quarrington: and if worthy Master Blechynden loved his child, she on her part returned his affection with all the warmth of her loving nature. In her opinion, no man existed so

brave, so good, so noble as her father; to her, his word was law, and his wishes had but to be known to be obeyed. Now, from her earliest childhood the maiden had been accustomed to ride about the manor, and go where she listed. A bold horsewoman, therefore, had she become, and at the time I write of would roam over the country far and wide on her beautiful black mare "Bessie," and many a rustic would stop and gaze upon the pair with fond admiration as they passed, and marvel which, mare or mistress, was the most perfect of the two. But of all her haunts Mistress Alice Blechynden loved Bockhanger and the neighbourhood of her home the best. No fear had she of witch or wizard, perhaps because she well knew that such creatures never hurt beautiful young ladies or splendid black mares, or more probably because the tender purity of her young spirit kept from her aught that was evil, and was its own safeguard against any such dangers as the power of magic might invoke. Anyhow, through Bockhanger Mistress Alice was wont to rove when and where she would, and the old forest was as dear to her as her father's own manor-house. She loved it for the quiet grandeur of its old trees; she loved it for the peaceful stillness which contrasted with the bustle of everyday life; she loved it for its very wildness, and the deer and other animals which frequented it seemed to her like friends of her childhood, less afraid of her, as they were, than of any other mortal being, and appearing to know that from her hand at least they could take no harm.

So it chanced that upon the Tuesday in the week for which Nicholas Blechynden had fixed his hunt,

his daughter mounted Bessie towards the eve of the day, and rode into Bockhanger. The hunt was to be on the Thursday, and as Mistress Alice passed slowly along the narrow way through which alone she could penetrate the thicker parts of the Forest, she looked upon the deer with a mournful eye, as, ever and anon, they started from their lair, thinking how sad it was that they must suffer for the sport of man, and how cruel it seemed to rouse and drive them with hound and horn from their quiet home in the woodland thicket. Such thoughts, however, dwelt not long in the breast of even the most gentle of maidens in those days, and the daughter of Blechynden had shaken them off before she had ridden many hundred yards into the Forest. She looked around upon the weird old trees —old even then, although more than at present intermixed with young saplings just starting into tree-life, —and she rode slowly along beneath their overhanging branches, which even at that time of year gave no small shelter from wind and rain. Shelter, however, was not required that day, for it was one of those November afternoons when autumn seems for a moment to have repented of its advance towards winter, and fallen back regretfully to summer weather. The leaves had ceased to fall—there was scarcely a breath of air to encourage their doing so, —and the sun was shining with a subdued summer light, which warmed the atmosphere and at the same time showed to perfection every fantastic shape and grotesque attitude which the venerable trees assumed. No one who has not seen them can believe their quaintness, or how trees continue to live in such strange forms: one entirely split in two, each half lean-

ing away from the other as if desiring to separate after a violent quarrel, and yet each throwing out healthy, vigorous branches from its pollarded top; another, with a comparatively small trunk, suddenly expanding into an enormous head, apparently so top-heavy with branches growing therefrom that you would expect it to topple over and come to the ground; another positively almost flat upon the ground, and perfectly hollow inside, but yet alive, thriving and vigorous. I might go on describing the old trees for an hour longer, but I have said enough to show you that Mistress Alice had plenty of objects to distract her thoughts and occupy her attention. So she rode gently through the wood for some way, until she came near to the north-west corner, where the little streamlet of the Stour passed through the very outskirts of Bockhanger on its way to Quillett's Pond. Then a sudden thought seized her that she would visit the pond, or at all events have a canter over the meadow below the wood. So she passed out into the open field, crossed the ford over the stream at the corner, turned her horse's head towards Bokham, and cantered gaily upon the grass by the side of the stream. She passed the spot where the stream flowed opposite the pond, cantered on for some distance to the road which led over to the south side of the stream, there crossed the bridge, and so, turning in her course, rode back in a straight line to Quillett's Pond, meaning to pass between the upper and lower ponds, at the head of the latter of which stands the oak and bubbles the famous spring.

Softly did black Bessie canter over the turf until she came nearly opposite the oak, and then suddenly

stopped short. Her rider spoke to her to cheer her on. No whip did she ever require, and nought but kind words did she ever hear from the lips of her dear mistress; none so ready to obey as Bessie, none so ready to carry her precious burden whithersoever she would, and to stop in her canter or disobey that voice was altogether a new thing in her history. Yet so it was. She stood still as a rock, and refused to pass the oak; and while the daughter of Blechynden was wondering at the reason of this extraordinary conduct on the part of her usually tractable favourite, there came from the tree, or the spring,—she could not tell which,—a voice which spoke these words, in tones clear and sweet as the vesper-bell upon a still summer's eve:—

"How gaily the maiden rides over the mead;
How light is her heart, how exultant her steed!
Yet soon would she pause could she certainly know
To her Sire and his House the foreboding of woe."

No sooner did she hear these words than the old legend of the Wizard's Oak flashed across Mistress Alice's mind like lightning. Doubtless it was a magic voice that spoke—and oh! what did it portend? A foreboding of woe to her Sire and his House? The Saints forbid! But she must know more! Not a thought of fear crossed that brave young heart for a single instant. Strong in her truth and purity, she knew and she feared no evil; her one sole thought was for her father, and for his sake she would have faced anything and everything which could come against her. So, without the delay of a moment, she turned her mare's head towards the oak, and urged

her to approach it. This time Bessie obeyed, and as she drew near, upon the pond side, her rider exclaimed, in tones trembling with earnestness,—

"Oh voice, from whomsoever thou comest, tell me more. What woe threatens my beloved father, and what can I do to avert it?"

For an instant all was silent, and as she gazed eagerly forward, the maiden heard and saw nothing save the ripple upon the surface of the pond, and the tall reeds on either side waving gently to and fro as a soft breath of air stirred their slender stems; then, sweet and clear sounded the voice again, and this time she could easily discover that it came from the Wizard's Oak:—

"I note the rise of Thursday's morn,
I hear the sound of hound and horn;
They go to hunt—and fathom not
The plotting of the crafty Scot,
Who steels his sword and arms his men
Against the thoughtless Blechynden."

Here the voice stopped, but the maiden beseechingly and hastily cried, "Oh, speak again! Tell me what may be done? Can evil be kept from my own dear father?" And in an instant came the sound—.

"Tho' Fate may not be soothed or charmed—
Forewarned is evermore Forearmed;
And best protected he who knows
Before, the coming of his foes.
Yet when o'erwhelming force assail,
The stoutest heart may haply fail;
And blest the help, from man or maid,
Which furnishes a timely aid.
When Thursday sees the hour of two
That must be done which friend can do.

Mount, maiden, slack not in thy speed,
'Tis then that Blechynden has need:
Need instant—if from danger grave
The Hatch retainers still may save.
But tarry till the hour of three,
And all too late that aid will be!"

You may imagine the feeling with which Blechynden's daughter listened to these words. She guessed readily enough what they meant, and the warning which they conveyed, for, well acquainted with the jealousy existing between her father and De Baliol, she understood the allusion to "the Scot" at once, and fancied the danger to be as great as it really was without any effort of imagination. She implored the oracle to tell her further particulars, but her beseeching was in vain. The voice spake no more, and after fervently thanking the unknown friend for his warning, Mistress Alice turned her horse's head homewards, and hurried thither at best speed. You may well believe that she lost no time in imparting to her father the information so mysteriously obtained. Stout Nicholas laughed out loudly at first, and was disposed to treat the matter lightly, for fear and he were strangers, and even had he entirely believed the warning, he would have cared little for hard blows fairly given and taken. But his daughter's evident anxiety, and her earnest prayers that he would take heed to himself and regard the Wizard's words, after a while worked their effect upon Blechynden, and though he said that it was out of the question to give up or postpone his hunt, he promised faithfully that he would take every precaution.

Early, therefore, on Wednesday morning he sent word to his old friend Edmund Staplegate, the master

of Bilsington Manor, who had been engaged to join the hunt, telling him that the affair might prove one in which men as well as deer would have to be chased, and begging him therefore to come with as many followers as he could conveniently gather in the time. Nicholas sent, moreover, to those of his neighbours on the north side of Bockhanger upon whom he thought he could rely, and thus, with his own retainers, he found that on the Thursday morning he had some hundred and thirty men, besides the Bilsington party, which numbered more than forty.

Entering the wood at the bottom of what is now called the Horse Park, the hunters proceeded in an easterly direction, driving their game before them with hound and horn, through the Rookery and then across the Boatpond Bay and through the Deer-paddock of the present day in the direction of the Sandpit. It must not be supposed that the whole number of Blechynden's followers entered the Forest at the same point. In fact, not more than fifty were with the master of Quarrington himself, the rest, under the separate command of John Chittenden, his bailiff, having taken up their ground in the Bircholt meadows below the Sandpit, whilst Staplegate's men followed a wild track which wound through the centre of the Forest, keeping in the rear of the hunters, ready to assist if need should be. Now John de Baliol had laid his plans warily, determined, if possible, to draw his enemy into an ambuscade. One hundred men had he posted on the slope of the hill which is now on the north side of Barracks Wood, having the wood behind them and on their right and left, with easy shelter behind the old pollard-trees which studded the

hill as now; whilst before them was the wide, marshy ditch running up from the Heron Pond, and forming a natural, if only temporary, barrier against any foe who should attempt to carry the hill by assault on the north side. At the head of that marshy ditch another hundred men were posted, under the immediate command of De Laurence. Protected by the wood like the first body, they had thrown up light earthworks and felled several trees, from behind which they could meet any attack from the front, having the hill and their friends to fall back upon. With the remainder of his forces John de Baliol himself had advanced towards the north or Bircholt edge of the Forest, and had occupied as strong a position as he could find, expecting to fall upon his unprepared enemy as he came through the wood, probably in swift pursuit of the deer. De Baliol's scouts, however, were not long in reporting that a number of men had established themselves in the Bircholt meadows, from which Baliol suspected that, if not actually warned of his danger, he of Quarrington had at least taken the precaution to guard against any probable surprise. He felt sure, however, that he could not be aware of the numbers of the enemy which he would have to encounter, and therefore did not think it necessary to alter his own plans in any material degree. He advanced, indeed, somewhat nearer to the Sandpit, bearing, however, somewhat to the south, and planted his men to the best advantage in the wood, awaiting with anxiety, but without fear of the result, the approach of Blechynden.

Merrily rang the horns, and cheerfully shouted the hunters as they pressed on through the Forest, and presently at the Sandpit the deer headed southwards,

and bore right down upon John de Baliol's position. As he was making his way through the thicket, with friends right and left, cheering his hounds on with his loud and deep voice, Blechynden was suddenly made aware of the presence of his enemy. Mounted upon a white charger, right in his path, stood John de Baliol, apparently determined to bar his passage.

"Who art thou?" said the lord of Scott's Hall, "who comest hither with hound and horn, and chasest the deer belonging to others?"

"None other here hath better right than I," quoth the sturdy Blechynden; "and, what is more, none shall stay me from my sport."

"Ha! sayest thou so, Master Malapert!" replied De Baliol, and, spurring his horse forward, he aimed a blow with his sword at Nicholas, which the latter with difficulty avoided, but being on foot, immediately afterwards dodged among the trees, where his mounted enemy could not follow. At the same time he shouted loudly to his friends, who gathered quickly around him; whilst De Baliol, seeing that he had no chance of riding down his enemy then and there, fell back upon his men, who thereupon opened fire (so to speak) with cross-bows upon the advancing forces of Blechynden. And now ensued one of those woodland battles in which it is hard to know who has the best or the worst of the fray. Each party concealed themselves as well as they could behind trees and thickets, taking every opportunity to shoot at any of the enemy who showed themselves for a moment. This species of warfare, however, could be of no long continuance, nor was it De Baliol's policy that it should be so, as he wished to draw his opponents back

upon his reserves. Therefore he gave orders to his people to fall gradually back, and accordingly so they did. Nicholas, however, was in no hurry to advance, nor did he do so until Chittenden and Staplegate came up, which they did within a short space of time, having been summoned immediately upon the beginning of the fray. Having now a decided superiority in numbers, the Quarrington people began to press those of De Baliol, advancing in a semicircle, so that their foes could scarcely conceal themselves behind the trees as effectually as they had hitherto done. Slowly, therefore, they fell back through the brakes and wood, making head for the ambuscade at the end of the Horse-pond ditch. It might now be about noon, and within a brief space the Scott's Hall party had been pushed back close upon their hidden friends. Then Blechynden's men grew bolder: few had, up to this time, been hurt on either side; but, convinced of their superior strength, the apparently successful party began to be less cautious, and to push forward with greater rapidity.

Meanwhile, as soon as the fight had become general, some one of the party, more anxious than the rest, or caring less to be hunting men instead of deer, had hurried back to Quarrington to give notice of what had happened. No sooner did Mistress Alice hear the news than she threw up her hands and exclaimed, "Oh, the Wizard! the Wizard! His words were true, and I must save my father!"

She ordered Bessie to be saddled directly, and mounting without delay, she entered the Forest and set off in the direction of Hatch. It was not easy to ride fast through that tangled wood, but she made the

best of her way, and before two o'clock rode into the courtyard of Thomas Knatchbull's house. As good luck would have it, the first person she saw was the owner himself, and by the number of men and horses about, she rightly judged that he had either had some warning of the probability of something which would call for action on his part, or else was meditating an expedition on his own account.

"Oh, Master Knatchbull!" breathlessly exclaimed the maiden, "my father, my dear father, is in peril. Ralph the herd has come back from the hunt, and he says that the wicked lord of Scott's Hall has come forth with a great host against our people. You know how brave and rash is my father! Oh, aid him, gentle sir! aid him an ye will before he be overmastered by these enemies!" As she spoke she clasped her hands and looked at the Master of Mersham Hatch with such beseeching eyes that he had been no true Knatchbull had he resisted their appeal.

"By St. Edward the Confessor," said he, "I will aid your father, sweet Mistress Alice, an I give my life for his!" And, without more ado, he drew from his belt a small silver trumpet, and sounded thereupon a shrill, clear blast.

"Forward, my merry men all," he cried; "forward, for the moment is come!" and he strode forward amongst his now excited followers. Pausing, however, for an instant, he turned to the maiden: "But thou, fair dame," he said, "but thou wilt tarry here; or shall I send those with thee who will escort thee through the wood to Quarrington in safety?"

Alice flushed to the brow. "Never!" cried she, "never shall it be said that the daughter of a

Blechynden tarried in safety whilst her father fought at odds on the battle-field! I follow thee, Master Knatchbull,—oh, forbid me not to share my father's danger!"

Thomas Knatchbull hesitated, but he felt that this was no time for dallying, so he speedily replied, "Come an thou wilt, sweet mistress, though I would fain thou hadst remained in safety; but I cannot and will not stay thee if thou art resolved;" and with these words he issued from the courtyard, followed by some sixty or seventy stalwart men. For, after fully considering in his own mind the matter of the Forester's warning, he had determined to throw away no chance, and had sent round the evening before to his people to be in readiness to proceed to Hatch by one o'clock on Thursday, in case they might be wanted for service of danger.

Langford, his steward, was a man of great courage and determination, and besides the men whom he had hastily summoned at his master's command, he had obtained the aid of Master Loftie of Stock, and sundry of his retainers. The party left Hatch soon after two, and made their way as quickly as they could to that part of the forest which is now Barracks wood, entering it not far from the south-west corner of the Heron Pond.

Meanwhile matters had somewhat changed since the time when we left the two parties fighting in the wood. As Blechynden's men pressed boldly forward, driving in their opponents and advancing with loud and victorious shouts, there suddenly opened upon them a furious cross-bow discharge from the detachment of De Laurence, behind whose entrenchments De Baliol

and his men had by this time retired. They concealed themselves at once, as well as they could, behind the trees and in the bushes, but the cross-bow bolts fell fast and furious, several men were slain, and not a few hurt. Then Staplegate with his Bilsington men made a furious dash at the ditch, some hundred yards lower down, intending to cross and take the ambushed men in flank; but here, to his surprise, he was met by the arrows of the men under Pashley's command, many of whom were armed with long-bows, and showered in their missiles in a manner most unpleasant to the advancing party. Three of Staplegate's men were shot whilst crossing the ditch, several others were hit more or less severely, and Staplegate himself had half of one ear carried away by an arrow, of which event he remarked, with a grim smile, that, after all, "a miss was as good as a mile."

Matters now looked serious, although Blechynden might no doubt have made good his retreat through the Forest had he been so inclined. But the Blechyndens were always better hands at advancing than retreating, and bold Nicholas never allowed such a thought to enter his head. He carefully traversed the line of his forces from end to end, and finding that they were alive to the peril of their position, but all in good heart, and eager for the fray, he bade them take breath and merely keep up a return discharge of arrows for about a quarter of an hour, and then, when they were well breathed, he launched them in a vigorous attack against the light barricades behind which De Laurence was entrenched. For a moment the attack seemed likely to succeed; the impetuous rush of the valiant Blechynden carried

his men forward with a power before which their foes gave way, and a hand-to-hand fight commenced, all the more favourable to the Quarrington men because their brave leader struck down De Laurence himself with a tremendous blow as he met him face to face. He of Somerfield was only stunned, it is true, but as soon as his men saw him fall they wavered, and would probably have given way had not De Baliol been at hand. Encouraging them with shouts and gestures, and upbraiding them with their cowardice in yielding to a force so much fewer in numbers than their own, he not only rallied the doubting warriors, but, backed by Dick Fleming, and supported by some of Pashley's reserve from the bank, brought against his enemies so overwhelming a force that the Quarrington party was obliged to fall back. Nor was this all—they were forced from the barricades into the wood, and, finding themselves now vastly outnumbered, were with difficulty prevented from breaking away into the Forest and dispersing among the thickets and glades, where they would be safe from pursuit. However, the efforts of Blechynden and Staplegate restrained them from such a course, though indeed even these might have been unsuccessful had they not been reinforced at that critical moment by some twenty Mersham poachers, who, having been on the watch for stray deer from the moment that the hunt began, and finding that the followers of Blechynden, who was a popular neighbour, were attacked by those of De Baliol, who, as a comparative stranger (his family not having been settled above a hundred years in the county of all others most tenacious of ancient rights and old blood), was much the reverse, they hovered

about for a little while, and then, with a cry of "St. George for merry England," joined the band of Blechynden as it was actually wavering before the hostile attack.

It was now nearly two o'clock, and for a time the retreating force made a gallant stand, taking advantage of every tree and mound, and sending in a flight of arrows whenever they had a chance of hitting an enemy. Baliol, however, had now brought forward all his men to a general attack—the arrows of both sides were nearly exhausted, and it was time to come to close quarters. With swords, clubs, and sharpened stakes the men charged fiercely upon their opponents, driving them from tree to tree, and giving and exchanging blows with fearful rapidity and force. Now indeed was Nicholas Blechynden sore bestead. Blood was streaming from a flesh wound inflicted by the point of a stake which had pierced his thigh; his shoulder had been bruised by the blow of an arrow, which had fortunately struck upon some strong piece of leather, which alone had prevented its piercing him; his arm was weary with striking, and, although his heart was yet undaunted, he began to think that there was little left for him but an honourable death. A hand-to-hand fight with De Baliol was just now the chief object of his desires, but it was unlikely that it would be obtained, as the crafty Scot knew his advantage in numbers and position too well to expose himself to unnecessary personal risk. Blechynden looked right and left to see how his men were faring. Hard by was stern Staplegate, who had never yielded one inch, and was now, with his back against an oak tree, stoutly defending himself against several

retainers of the foe. John Chittenden lay apparently lifeless on the ground, having met Pashley of Evegate face to face, and received from him a blow which had felled him like a log; whilst as for the Mersham poachers, those of the Scott's Hall people who were especially devoted to the chase of the deer, to wit, the keepers and foresters, had paid them such particular attention that they had suffered in proportion more than all the rest. Head had a disabled arm, Dennis a broken head, and as for bully Jack Waters, he had received as bad a beating as that which he had previously experienced at the hands of the Wizard of Bockhanger. So as the Master of Quarrington gazed around, he found that things were so that the odds were all against his leaving the Forest safe and sound as he had entered it that morning. Collecting his strength, however, and resolved to sell his life dearly, he cried out to his men in a voice still loud and bold—

"Stand fast, my boys, stand fast, for house and home! Well struck, Master Staplegate, well parried, brave neighbour! Stand to your trees, my men, and never yield an inch."

Loud he shouted, and bravely still fought his men, but the odds were too great, and a few moments must have seen their total defeat, when at that very instant the sound of a shrill, clear trumpet broke upon the ears of the combatants, and the cry of "A Knatchbull! a Knatchbull!" rang through the air. So it was indeed that Mistress Alice had, by obeying the Wizard's orders, brought succour in the nick of time to her father, and struck terror into the hearts of his enemies. Thomas Knatchbull had advanced into the wood on

the south side of the Heron Pond, and then, hearing the sound of the fighting bearing northwards, left his fair companion to follow at a safe distance, guarded by four trusty men, and hastened onward. Crossing the arm of the Heron Pond, at the head of which De Laurence had lain in ambush, and which he passed without difficulty some short distance from the pond, he pushed forward his men as rapidly as possible, and appeared upon the left wing of De Baliol's band as they were driving before them the slowly retreating right of Blechynden's party.

This unexpected arrival entirely changed the aspect of affairs. De Baliol was too good a soldier to continue an advance which would expose his flank to the attack of a fresh enemy, probably well provided with the ammunition of which his own people began to stand in need, nor could he judge with certainty of the numbers of the new-comers, though their war-cry told him that it was pretty certain to be considerable, as the Knatchbull retainers were not a few, and their chief, moreover, was not an adversary to be despised. De Baliol had long since dismounted and sent his white charger to the rear, in order that he might not present so ready a mark to the archers of the other side, and he now hastened, sword in hand, to the left wing of his forces, where he halted for a moment in order to assure himself of the strength and intentions of the Hatch contingent. Foremost of his men came stout Thomas Knatchbull, armed with a stout staff, heavily loaded at one end, which, as he ever said, he deemed the best weapon for a hand-to-hand fight in the Forest or on the green turf. John De Baliol faced him as he led his band forward.

"How now, Master Knatchbull? Why comest thou hither to spoil sport, and prevent the fair settlement of an old dispute?"

"Nay," replied the other; "I come to hinder no fair settlement, but to stay the strong from crushing the weak by force of numbers."

"But," rejoined De Baliol, "you should not aid poachers and marauders against those who protect the Church's rights and guard the deer against lawless men."

"*In crucifixâ gloria mea*," returned Knatchbull, quoting the old motto of his family. "My glory is in the Cross, and my care is for the Church; but methinks it is scarce for the Church or for the monks of Canterbury that the lord of Scott's Hall is fighting today. Besides, I know not how Nicholas Blechynden can be called more lawless than his neighbours, nor will I see him wronged."

"Wronged!" cried De Baliol; "not wronged, but worsted in fair fight, and great shame to hinder such a settlement, say I. What wouldest thou, Master Knatchbull?"

"I would peace among neighbours," replied the person addressed, "and that thou and Simon withdraw thy men-at-arms and interfere no more with each other."

"And if not?—if I refuse to withdraw at thy bidding?" asked Baliol haughtily.

"Then will I even strike a blow for mine ancient friend Nicholas," returned the other, "for, be the cost what it may, I will not have him injured."

Baliol hesitated for an instant. Cautious he was, though brave, and he did not fancy the encounter with a new enemy and fresh men. Still, with

Blechynden so nearly in his power, he could hardly endure the thought of giving over the battle, and his proud heart was filled with indignation at being thus checked in the moment of victory.

"By St. Andrew!" he cried, "thou hast played us a scurvy trick, Master Knatchbull, and one which, go this matter how it may, I shall scarce forget to repay."

"Forget or remember," returned the other, "it matters not to me; but surely it is for the King alone to make wars in England, and not for nobles and gentlemen to take their quarrels into their own hands."

Baliol was about to reply, when Pashley and the Evegate men, heated with their exertions and flushed with success, being unable longer to restrain themselves, raised aloud their cry, "A Pashley, a Pashley!" and began to advance upon their new foes, with whom the half-discomfited ranks of Blechynden's right wing had now joined, and who prepared at once to offer a stubborn resistance. Waving his club in his hand, Thomas Knatchbull prepared to receive them, and shouted aloud to Blechynden, who, side by side with old Staplegate, now stood by the oak where the other had made so gallant a stand.

"Courage, old friend! stand fast and strike hard, and Right against Might will win the day."

"That will I do, friend Knatchbull," replied Nicholas; and in another moment the fight would have recommenced in all its fury, when it was interrupted by an extraordinary incident. A low, sweet strain of music, gradually increasing in volume and sound, like the band of a dozen regiments marching and playing

together, filled the ears of the astonished hearers, who fell back on each side; then, marching slowly forward between the ranks of the contending parties, appeared a herd of deer making their way, two and two, in solemn procession. On they trooped, apparently quite regardless of the presence of Man, and showing neither surprise nor alarm. On and on they came in a long, unvarying, unbroken line, until it extended the whole distance between the two bodies of men; then the procession halted, and for one moment all was silent as the grave. Then, suddenly, there appeared as if by magic, in the middle of the deer—some of which formed a circle around him and stood perfectly still—the tall figure of a man, of venerable and imposing aspect, who held a wand in his hand, which he stretched forth, and appeared as if about to speak. Everyone remained wrapt in the most profound amazement, and perfect silence prevailed as the following words fell upon the ears of all:—

"Hateful to Forest Powers is strife,
Hateful the sound of clanging blows,
Wound given for wound, and life for life,
In mad encountering of foes.
Cease, Baliol, cease; restrain thy might;
Tempt not the awful Doom to fall,
Lest it should strike, for wrong or right,
Upon the mansion of Scott's Hall.
Stay, Blechynden, thy reckless hand,
Go homewards with the setting sun;
Knatchbull! disperse thy threat'ning band
Now that thy work is fairly done.
See gather round the rising gloom;
Go! and respect the Wizard's Doom!"

He spoke, and even as he made an end of speaking a dense mist seemed to rise from the ground and

darken the whole forest. Then came a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a tremendous clap of thunder, and after the lapse of a few seconds, passed in the deepest silence, the light of day reappeared, and not a sign of deer or Wizard was to be seen—all traces of the one and the other had vanished, and the gentlemen and their followers saw nothing whatever of the extraordinary vision. It had not, however, been seen without producing its effect. A change had passed over the spirits of all, and there was no inclination for more fighting. Slowly and sullenly De Baliol withdrew his forces, whilst Knatchbull and Blechynden united theirs, and fell back also in the direction of the Heron Pond. Nearly half of the Quarrington men had been wounded in the day's battle, whilst Baliol's men had to deplore nearly as many disasters. Few had been slain outright on either side, and both De Laurence and stout John Chittenden recovered from their hard knocks, and were none the worse for them after a few days.

After hearing of the cause of Thomas Knatchbull's timely arrival, Blechynden's first care was for his daughter, and you may fancy his delight when she met him, safe and sound, at the head of the Heron Pond. I am afraid they attributed the satisfactory termination of the day more to Mistress Alice's journey, and the consequent appearance of Thomas Knatchbull upon the scene of action, than to the vision of the Wizard and his deer. But, however that might be, they were sincerely rejoiced that matters had ended so well, and accordingly proceeded on their homeward journey with weary limbs, but hearts light and joyful. About the centre of the Forest they parted

company, Nicholas and his daughter returning to Quarrington, whilst Thomas Knatchbull and his retainers rode off to Hatch, accompanied by Edmund Staplegate, whose road to Bilsington lay also in that direction. De Baliol and his friends went on their way in a less contented mood. They had carefully laid their plans, and to find victory snatched from their grasp at the very moment when it had appeared secure was a vexatious termination of the day's proceedings. John de Baliol rode sullenly at the head of his troop, passing through Joe Farm up to the Ridgway, and so away to the plain of Callan and the park of Scott's Hall. By his side rode De Laurence and Pashley, the former having sufficiently recovered from the effects of Blechynden's blow to be able to mount his horse. All three pursued their way in silence for some time: at last Pashley broke forth into abuse of Thomas Knatchbull for his uncalled-for interference, and suggested that some steps should be taken to punish him for the same. De Baliol was by no means disinclined to such a proposal, but replied that the master of Hatch was so evidently under the protection of some mysterious power that he hardly saw his way to a successful result of any attack upon him. Then the three gentlemen discussed the events of the day, and marvelled greatly at the strange vision which they had beheld, the like of which had never been seen in England, or, so far as they knew, in any other country. It was in vain to explain it by attributing it to any ordinary cause. Magic alone could have made deer so tame—Magic alone could have raised that curious and sudden mist and dispersed it again in a moment; the appearance and form of the

Being who had spoken to them savoured only of Magic, and it was evident that Bockhanger was in the hands of this mysterious man—if man he were—who had put an end to the fray, and saved, as they thought, their foes from destruction. So, after some further conversation, the three friends agreed, even before they had reached Scott's Hall, that it was vain to fight against adversaries who were allied with the powers of Magic and with Beings possessed of might beyond that of men, and that probably the wisest course would be to patch up the quarrel and once more live in a neighbourly manner together. They were the more confirmed in these views by the advice of De Poynings, who, although he had refused to join in John de Baliol's designs, had ridden over with a hundred followers in the afternoon with the intention of mediating between the two parties if the battle should have terminated in such a manner as to admit of mediation. He strongly urged that such occurrences as had taken place that day were really a scandal to the neighbourhood; that it was impossible they could be repeated without considerable risk of measures being taken by the Court to put an end to them; and that it was on all accounts most desirable that some friendly arrangement should be come to, and an end put, once for all, to these unseemly squabbles. De Baliol felt the force of these arguments, and after a lengthened discussion it was agreed that De Poynings should next day visit Thomas Knatchbull, and that if Blechynden would confide his cause to the latter, the two should endeavour to settle the dispute between Scott's Hall and Quarrington. So the four gentlemen supped toge-

ther at De Baliol's mansion, and early next morning De Poynings set off upon his mission.

Thomas Knatchbull was far too sensible a man to hesitate in acceding to the request of his neighbour, and Blechynden's assent having been obtained, the two laid their heads together and formed a plan which they thought would be acceptable to both parties, binding each not to cross a certain line drawn across the middle of the Forest. Thus, then, ended the matter, as far as the dispute betwixt the two neighbours was concerned, and peace and harmony once more prevailed.

This would have been a good point at which to have concluded my story, and I should have gladly left matters as they remained after the settlement of this dispute, were it not for the occurrence which shortly afterwards followed, and without the narration of which my chronicles of the Wizard of Bockhanger would be incomplete. I have told you that the three Monks, whose journey to the Forest had proved so unpleasant, did not suffer the whole truth to be known in the neighbourhood. They were, however, obliged to give to the Prior of their Monastery a true and exact account of all that had happened, and even if they had not done so, the matter would have become known to the world by means of the serving-men who had accompanied them, and who could not possibly keep their tongues quiet after having witnessed such strange scenes. The old Spring wood rabbit, who either knew, or pretended to know, more about this part of the story than even the moorhens, could not tell me the name of this Prior, having forgotten, if indeed he had ever heard

it. But, whatever the name of the Holy man, he was naturally very much grieved and scandalized that such an insult should have been suffered by any of the brotherhood over whom he ruled. It was an unheard-of thing that Monks, duly deputed by their Head, could not visit the property of their own Monastery without being exposed to misfortunes such as the three good Fathers had undergone, and it was past all belief that any evil powers of Magic should have been able to defy these pious men upon the very property of the Church itself. The thing was, at all events, not to be tolerated, and some action must certainly be taken.

Accordingly the Prior took counsel with the wisest men he could find, and laid the case before them, being determined to act with caution, but at the same time with a strong hand to put down the enemy, man or wizard, who had dared to trifle with the Fathers of the Monastery. As is usually the case when anybody takes the advice of several other people, some advised one thing and some another, and the Prior became more and more confused and undecided what to do. So he called Fathers Gregory, Anselm, and Hubert to him, and tried to persuade them that there must have been some mistake, that Magic could not *really* have had anything to do with the matter, and that another journey might be attended with more successful results. But with one accord the three worthy Fathers declared that they would prefer to live for a month on nothing but bread and water rather than again enter that fearful wood; and when the Prior pressed the matter further, Father Hubert hid, Father Gregory declared that he was under a vow not to leave Canterbury for six months, and Father Anselm took to his bed and

sent in a doctor's certificate that he was suffering from half-a-dozen serious complaints. So the Prior, finding that he did not meet with any ready response from these three worthies, and being unable himself to quit the Monastery without great inconvenience, determined upon other measures. He summoned to Canterbury the owners of Scott's Hall, Mersham Hatch, Quarrington, Westenhanger, and Somerfield, together with sundry other of their neighbours, for the purpose of making a full inquiry into all matters appertaining to Bockhanger and its mysterious occupant.

Priors were powerful in those days, and not one of the persons summoned ventured to disobey. A court of inquiry was held at the Monastery, from the results of which the Prior learned many things which he had never known before, not only as regarded the Wizard, but also concerning the hunting disputes between De Baliol and Blechynden. These disputes, it may here be observed, were finally and satisfactorily settled upon this occasion, for the Prior gave formal licence to the two gentlemen to pursue their sport, and confirmed the boundary agreed upon between them, only providing that each should annually render to the Monastery a handsome rent, to be paid in venison and other game. But the Wizard's matter was by far the more serious. It could not be said that his power had been entirely, or even generally, exercised for evil, but still it was not a power which the authorities of the Monastery could for a moment recognize; and, not proceeding from themselves, it *must* come of evil origin. So, after deep and grave consideration, the Prior gave forth his decree that the Wizard's Oak should be forthwith cut down, the spring

filled up, and the pond drained dry and levelled in with the surrounding land.

Then, however, arose the question who should carry out the orders thus given. Each of the gentlemen present excused himself from the duty. Thomas Knatchbull urged, with good reason, that as the mysterious powers of the tree had ever proved themselves so friendly to him and Blechynden, it would be hard to impose upon *them* the task of destroying their benefactor's home. This plea was admitted, as was also that of De Poynings, who put forward as his excuse the distance of his residence from the place under discussion. De Baliol urged that he had sworn not to cross the boundary now fixed between Blechynden and himself, and could not be expected to break his oath, so altogether the good Prior found that to give an order and to obtain its execution were two different things. Determined, however, to be overcome by no obstacle, he directed a number of the retainers of the Monastery to be summoned, and accordingly a body of some two hundred persons, armed with axes and spades, were marched down the Valley of the Stour, with full directions to proceed to Bockhanger and carry out the orders of the Prior of St. Augustine's.

This band was placed under the command of John de Brent, a worshipful citizen of Canterbury, of good repute, and much attached to the Monastery and its Brotherhood, and it was composed of good and stalwart workmen, who, it was thought, would be able to carry out the task imposed upon them within the space of a few days. They proceeded upon their way in good spirits, having been blessed by the Prior at

starting, and refreshed by copious draughts of good ale before setting out. Nothing worth mentioning occurred to them in their progress to Wye, whence they marched to Hinxhill Church, and, then, turning to the left through Ouseley Farm and pastures, descended to the streamlet of the Stour, crossed to its south side, and began to follow its course in the direction of Quillett's Pond. Hardly, however, had they reached the road which, passing by Bokham Mill, crosses the Stour and leads thence to Mersham, before the sky became suddenly black with clouds, and, almost without any warning at all, down came a most tremendous fall of rain. So heavy and violent was it, that the men could hardly face it. They were wet to the skin in a moment, and, being yet half a mile short of the Forest, there were scarcely any trees under which they could have found some shelter, however slight. So they bore to the left, re-crossing the stream, and made for Bokham Mill. Scarcely had they reached it, and taken refuge, in spite of the growlings of surly old Bokham, in the stables and outhouses about the place, when the streamlet of the Stour, rising beyond its natural borders in an extraordinary and rapid manner, as if swelled by the wonderful fall of rain, flooded the whole of the meadow between their place of refuge and Quillett's Pond, in such a manner as to render all approach to the latter absolutely impossible. They waited all day and all night, ate up all old Bokham's provisions and their own too, and woke next morning to find matters no better, and that they could get to the pond and the oak from that side only in boats, of which there were none.

John de Brent did not much like the look of things, but he had his duty to perform, and was determined to do it if he could. So the next day, after his men had dried their clothes and made themselves ready, he led them back to the higher ground by Ouseley, and round by the Ashford Road to the same track by which the three Monks had entered Bockhanger upon their unfortunate expedition. Then he turned down into the wood, keeping near the outside, and came out above Quillett's Pond, in the green pastures of which I have spoken before. And when he and his men looked in front of them, lo! the waters on the other side of the pond had quite disappeared! the streamlet was flowing in its usual course, and everything appeared quiet and pleasant! So John de Brent marched forward with his men, four of whom advanced straight upon the oak, armed with axes, while several of those who accompanied them had smaller hatchets and ropes, so that they might be able to cut off and pull away the branches. Meanwhile the rest of the men headed towards the other side of the pond, in order to begin to cut the drain as they had been directed.

John de Brent was a little in front of his men, and had got within a short distance of the doomed tree, when he was suddenly stopped by the sound of a voice issuing therefrom:—

> "Who comes with impious hand to strike this oak?
> Who tempts a curse on him and his to light?
> Back, varlets, back! or, should ye dare the stroke,
> Beware the vengeance of the Wizard's might!"

Now John de Brent was a very brave man, and feeling sure that he could not be injured whilst doing

his duty according to the orders of the Prior, determined not to yield to a mere voice proceeding from a tree. Being, moreover, a man of some ability, and occasionally a bit of a poet, he thought that, as he had been addressed in rhyme, he would even try to return answer in the same manner. Whereupon he looked steadily at the tree, cleared his throat, and replied thus:—

"I, John De Brent,
Am hither sent
With all these worthy folks:
My given work
I'll never shirk,
Not for a thousand oaks!"

And he resolutely strode forward towards the tree. Scarcely, however, had he spoken, when a loud peal of laughter burst forth from the oak, which so staggered the men who were following De Brent that they stood still with one consent, and trembled visibly. Their leader, irritated at this conduct, seized an axe from the first man, took one step in front and aimed a vigorous blow at the stem of the old tree.

But even as he struck, a wonderful event took place—the axe which he held, in the very act of striking, turned into a huge snake in his hand, and instead of hitting the tree fell to the ground, and, with a strange unearthly hissing, wriggled away into the rushes by the pond. De Brent started back in great affright, whilst again the laughter from the tree was redoubled. But the Canterbury citizen was not even now to be overcome; he turned round to his men with the intention of seizing another axe, when, to his great indignation, he saw them all taking to

flight, dropping their weapons as they ran, and, worse than all, each one of the latter followed the example of the first axe, and no sooner touched the ground than it became either a snake or a toad, and disappeared at once among the reeds and rushes. John de Brent was now fairly flabbergasted, and turned his eyes round to see what had become of the main body of his men. Here again he beheld a wonderful and unexpected sight. The men had crossed over to the north side of Quillett's, arranged their plans, and began to set to work and dig with good-will. Hardly, however, had they commenced, when the water of Quillett's Pond, raising itself up in a dense volume, began to pour down upon them like an enormous water-spout, wetted them through and through in an instant, and rendered work impossible. John de Brent looked with amazement and terror upon these occurrences, and was in a state of the greatest doubt as to what he should do next to perform the Prior's orders, when a terrible peal of thunder rolled through the heavens above, and slowly there stole a deep and mysterious darkness over wood and vale. Then from the oak once more there came a deep and solemn voice :—

"Back to thy masters, thou courageous man,
Thou canst not fathom what no mortal can.
Seek not unto thyself the right t' assume
To alter Fate's decree—the Wizard's doom!
No monk can stay His power in Bockhanger,
No mortal courage can His will deter.
Seek not th' Impossible, nor longer wait
To show thy weakness in the strife with Fate!"

And as these words were uttered, for one moment John de Brent, lifting up his eyes, saw, standing on

the other side of the spring, close to the oak, the form of a venerable Being, whom he knew full well could be none other than the Wizard of Bockhanger. He needed no more: the lightning now began to flash vividly, and the thunder to roll again; his men were flying, they scarce knew where, in wild confusion; and he saw clearly enough that the Prior had given him a task impossible to perform. So, slowly and sullenly, he drew back from the ancient oak, and strove to call together his scattered followers.

It was not until he had regained the Ashford road that the main body of his men reassembled, and then, looking back towards Quillett's Pond, they saw that everything had resumed its usual appearance. The thunder and lightning had passed away, the sun was once more shining brightly in the heavens, and his rays lit up the old pond with a cheerful, pleasant light, so that no one looking at the place from a distance would have supposed that there was anything extraordinary about it. John de Brent was half inclined to try once more to carry out the orders he had received from the Prior. But no earthly power could induce his men to approach the place again. They said that it was evidently not intended that the oak, spring or pond, should be destroyed, and ne'er a one of them would move hand or foot in such a matter again. So John de Brent was obliged to give it up as a bad job, and to lead his party back again to Canterbury, there to report to the Prior that the work was unaccomplished which he had directed to be done.

The Prior heard the tale with great indignation, but he knew De Brent to be a man of truth, and moreover as all the other men told the same story,

there was nothing for it but to believe them. So after some further consultation with the other monks and learned men, whose advice he deemed it well to seek, the Prior came to the sensible determination that if he could not drive the Wizard away from Bockhanger, he had better let him stop there. Perhaps, under all the circumstances, this was a wise resolution, and I believe that those who were consulted upon the matter were all agreed upon it. Therefore the pious owners of Bockhanger never, so far as I know, made any other attempt to free the Forest from its mysterious inhabitant, who continued to dwell there, an object of awe and wonder to the surrounding neighbourhood. The events which I have related had no inconsiderable effect upon the affairs of those gentlemen whose names I have had to mention. I have told you that the quarrel between Blechynden and De Baliol was finally settled, and in fact I believe no such fierce brawl was ever again known in that quiet region. One event, however (not exactly a brawl), occurred, which probably took its origin more or less from the events I have chronicled. Thomas Knatchbull was so struck with the beauty, wit, and courage of Mistress Alice Blechynden that he determined to seek her for his wife. Nothing loth was Nicholas that his daughter should wed with so gallant a gentleman, and after a time the matter was comfortably arranged, and the marriage was celebrated with great rejoicings. A feast was given in the old hall of Quarrington, at which the friends of the Houses of Knatchbull and Blechynden were assembled, and all was mirth and merriment.

In the midst of the fun, however, the attention of the party was suddenly aroused by the sound of

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music, which, growing gradually louder and louder, was evidently approaching the house. Quarrington stood rather low, close to the borders of the Forest, although the streamlet of the Stour intervened, and the house was surrounded by a moat. On hearing these strange but sweet sounds, the host directed the doors to be thrown open, and all the company went forth to learn the cause of the interruption. A wonderful sight indeed it was which greeted their astonished eyes. A vast herd of deer was issuing from the Forest, moving to the sound of the music, and stepping forward in the light and graceful manner peculiar to those animals. But there was something more to see. In a carriage drawn entirely by nobly-antlered bucks, right in the centre of the herd, sat an individual, whom all at once knew to be the Wizard of Bockhanger. On and on he came until he and his attendants had arrived at the stream, and stood within a few yards only of the marvelling wedding-guests. Then he stood upright in his carriage, and everyone noticed the kind and friendly expression upon his venerable countenance, as, in a voice peculiarly clear and thrilling, he pronounced these words:—

'Knatchbull and Blechynden unite;
Truth joins to truth, and good to good;
Be both protected by the might
Of powers that love the ancient wood.
Whilst still the sacred grove shall stand
Time works my sayings to fulfil:
Red shall become the Knatchbull hand,
But Knatchbull's house shall flourish still.
Join then, ye twain, in peace and love,
Blest by the guardians of the place;
Whilst ye revere her sacred grove
Old Bockhanger protects your Race!"

With these words the strange visitor thrice waved his wand over his head; the music, which had ceased during his speech, burst forth again in loud and joyous strains, and, slowly turning round, the whole procession retreated whence they came, and were soon lost in the depths of the Forest, the music dying softly out as they passed on, until at length it was heard no more. As Knatchbull and Blechynden had now seen the Wizard several times, and had experienced nought but good at his hands, they were no longer terrified at his appearance, knowing that it betokened good to them and theirs. So they reassured the more timid of the company, and, re-entering the house, finished their merrymaking as happily as possible. The prophecy of the Wizard seemed of a character to excite hope rather than fear, and although Mistress Alice shuddered at the idea of the Knatchbull's hand becoming red, yet, as it was coupled with a promise that his House should flourish, she was content that the prophecy should stand as it did. And, indeed, wise men have since interpreted this portion of the Wizard's speech to have referred to the fact, that in after days the Head of the house of Knatchbull was created a baronet, the crest and token of which dignity, as all the world knows, is a blood-red hand. This certainly came to pass in the reign of Charles the First, and may perhaps be accepted as the true interpretation of the prophecy. Be this as it may, however, the marriage of Thomas Knatchbull with sweet Mistress Alice was one of uninterrupted felicity. They sent "no cards," and it did not appear in the *Morning Post* because the *Morning Post* itself did not appear in those days, or else of course it would

have done so. Everybody that *did* hear of it was glad, and wished the Bride and Bridegroom joy with all their hearts. And so it turned out, for they lived very happily together all the rest of their lives; the blessing of the Wizard seemed to be very effectual, and when Nicholas Blechynden died at a good old age, the Manor of Quarrington became merged in the estates of Mersham Hatch, and the properties as well as the families were blended together.

Now you must not suppose that I have told you one-half or one-quarter of the doings of the Wizard of Bockhanger. Those who gave me the information upon which I have written this story, assured me that there were many more wonderful things which they could tell me, and I do not doubt it. The moorhens of Quillett's Pond know more than they choose to tell, and if I could be a boy again, go out as of old to walk and shoot, and have another opportunity of asking them questions, I am sure I should have a great deal more to tell you. At the same time, moorhens will not always tell what they know. Sometimes they are sullen and silent; sometimes they say they have their nests to attend to, and cannot be bothered with story-telling; and now and then they will have nothing to say to one, but bob down underneath the water like mere divers, and you only know whereabouts they are by the bubbles which spring up in eddying circles when they push their beaks above water to breathe. But I have told you all I learnt from the water-birds, and as to being a boy again, it is no use wishing for *that*, unless the Wizard could come back and help me. He will not come back. The place is greatly changed, and, if he *did* come, he would not know it again.

The old oak, however, is there still, and the spring bubbles up as fresh and clear and pure as ever; the pond, too, is in the same place, and the little streamlet of the Stour flows on in the self-same channel. I cannot tell you when, and how, the Wizard left the wood. Perhaps when they began to cut down the trees, and make an open deer-park in the midst of the Forest, he found it more than he could bear. Perhaps when the Monks were driven from Canterbury, and their property was given and taken by others, he thought that those who had scattered to the four winds of heaven the ashes of the Kentish saint, St. Thomas of Canterbury, might not respect even the sanctity of a Wizard's home. Perhaps he lingered still longer, and came occasionally to his former haunts, until the shrill whistle of the railway warned him that practical, hardworking, hurrying days had come upon England, and that witches, wizards, and magic had gone out together with romance and four-horse coaches. Perhaps — but we have had enough of "perhaps." It is sufficient to know that the Wizard has left Bockhanger for ever, and that we have only left to us the memory of his wondrous deeds.

And yet we have something more to remind us of the great power and knowledge of this extraordinary Being, in the singular fulfilment of his prophecies even to the very last. The great Houses of which he spake to their four owners, endured the destinies which he attributed to each. Scott's Hall had indeed a fall. First, however, it had a mighty rise. John de Baliol's descendants dropped the name of Baliol, and took that of Scott, by which they were afterwards known.

The Scotts grew great and powerful, they became the largest landowners in the county, and for a time it seemed as if the Wizard's doom would be falsified. They owned lands in Smeeth and Brabourne, and most of the adjoining parishes, and it was thought a great thing to be connected with such a family. But the downfall came. It is said that Queen Elizabeth struck the first blow, as she did to more than one of the more prosperous of her loving subjects, by doing them the honour of paying a royal visit to their mansions, the cost of which had the same effect upon their estates as the keeping of a white elephant in old days exercised upon the unfortunate people who were forced to accept the expensive gift. Queen Elizabeth certainly *did* come to Scott's Hall, and there is even now a cottage standing in which she is said to have changed her shoes, though why she should have performed this operation in a cottage, when the great house was close by, is more than I can tell you. But however this may be, the Scotts gradually declined in wealth, and their male line died out. At last, by marriage, the remnant of their estates came into the possession of the Honywoods of Evington, and by the then baronet of that name it was sold in 1824 to the family and descendants of Thomas Knatchbull, and the mansion itself was pulled down soon after the purchase. I am not sure whether there is still living any descendant of the main branch of the old family, but in the destruction of the house, and the departure of the Scotts from the place, the Wizard's doom may be said to have been fulfilled.

Westenhanger shared little better fate. It passed after many years from the possession of the De Poyn-

ings family, and eventually found its way into the hands of the House of Smythe, having been granted to them by the Crown, to whom it had fallen after the death of the last of the De Poynings. I do not know when the old house was pulled down—in fact, some portion of it still remains, but it has long dwindled down from a vast mansion into a farm-house, and those who visit the place walk round to see the ruins of what was once the beautiful seat of good Richard de Poynings. Somerfield also proved the truth of the Wizard's prediction. De Laurence left an only daughter, through whom the property came to the House of Apulderfield, after which it passed through many hands, the mansion was eventually dismantled, and at the present day is nothing more than a farm-house, nor is the name of De Laurence known in the neighbourhood. But Mersham Hatch endures still. True, it is not the old house, nor does it stand in precisely the same spot as the mansion of Thomas Knatchbull. *That* Mersham Hatch stood after the other three houses had all fallen, and it is not yet a hundred years since a new house was built upon a new site by the Knatchbull of the day. It overlooks that which was once part of Bockhanger, but which is now open park between Bockhanger and Barracks wood. The Boat Pond, the Heron Pond, the Sand Pit are all there still, and deer graze peacefully in the quiet park, undisturbed by the sound of hound and horn. Moreover, a Knatchbull still lives in the old place, and the legends and traditions of the olden time are not forgotten. But the name of Blechynden, De Laurence, and De Poynings are with us no longer, save as memories of the long-buried past. They have

gone by and perished as utterly as the leaves which the wind sweeps from the great beech-trees that shelter the western wing of Hatch, or as the dreams that you and I dreamed yesternight. The men of those days played their part in the world, and are now merely shadows of the past, as we, too, shall some day be when we have lived our allotted time upon the earth and gone out into the unknown world beyond.

And now I must bring to an end my story of the Wizard of Bockhanger. I have told you that He has long since left the place, but some of the mystery of His presence seems to cling to it yet. Walk out in the quiet summer evenings, beneath the shadows of those ancient trees, and the solemn stillness strikes you with a feeling of reverence and awe; whilst the trees themselves seem to speak to you of the old, old days, and of the strange events which they have witnessed. Oh! if they could but really speak! What tales they would tell us, and with what wrapt attention should we sit at their feet and listen! I do not know if there is any magic left in the wise world nowadays. But to me there is always magic in that old wood—the magic of tender, loving memories—the magic of faces never to be forgotten, and of words, spoken years ago, by voices which seem still ringing in mine ears. I shall see the faces there no more, and the voices are hushed and silent now, but ever and anon they come back in the vivid dreams of early, happy days, and so, blended as they are with these memories of childhood's hours, sweet to me, as long as life may last, will be the legends and chronicles of ancient Bockhanger!

XI.

"POTTER'S GIFT."

IT was a very wet day. Drip, drip, drip, fell the rain upon the roofs of the houses and along the gutter under the eaves until it found its way to the top of the water-pipes, and when (as was not unfrequently the case) the latter was choked up with leaves, it dripped over on to the ground below, to the great danger of hats and heads which happened to be passing underneath. The trees were like so many sponges, and if you took shelter under them, you very soon found that you might as well have got inside a shower-bath and pulled the string, for the effect was much the same. Puddles there were, in great plenty, even in the best-regulated high road, and the great big drops kept splashing steadily into them, and making them wider and larger every minute. The very dogs crouched, damp and wretched, under the nearest doorway they could find to hold them, and sat shivering and shaking without so much as a bark; as if the very voice had been washed out of them by the wet. The coachmen who drove past

had all got their great coats on, and where they were lucky enough to have a footman by their side, the latter hoisted the large carriage umbrella and they both crouched under it as well as they could, doing their best to avoid the dripping which *will* find its way to knees and feet even when their owners are safely seated under an umbrella on the box. Those who had neither footman nor umbrella fared somewhat worse; the wet slowly but surely soaked through their great coats; their hats lost their gloss; their gloves became a positive source of dampness and misery to them, and the wet and slippery reins caused them to drive under considerable disadvantage.

It was indeed a *very* wet day, and nothing seemed quite happy except the ducks, who, either from natural contentment or peculiarity of disposition, took a cheerful view of the matter, shook their wings constantly and quacked repeatedly in evident delight.

But however pleased the ducks might choose to be, very different was the case with Mrs. Martha Trumbles, as she toddled home from her shopping in the good old town of Ashford, and set her foot in a puddle a great deal oftener than she fancied comfortable. A highly respectable woman was Martha Trumbles, and withal careful of her dress and personal appearance. But upon the present occasion neither appeared to the best advantage. Her bonnet was rather damp than not, which arose principally from the fact that her umbrella had reached such a period of its existence, that it would really seem to the ordinary observer that she must keep it rather as a memory of what it once had been than for any service it could be at the present time, as if, like a

scarecrow, it would frighten away the rain which it could not really keep out. Anyhow, although Mrs. Trumbles had resolutely held it over her head, her bonnet was nearly in the same condition as if she had saved herself the trouble of doing so. Her shawl was also somewhat moist, and as to her boots, the combined efforts of mud and wet had rendered their condition highly unsatisfactory to the feet they enclosed. Still, however, those feet struggled on, and the object of the good woman's journey was pretty clearly shown by the basket which she carried on her arm. Tea, sugar, cheese—perhaps a herring—or even shrimps—not to mention butter and bread, I should have guessed to be among the contents of that basket. At all events, whatever they were, they were evidently worth carrying home, and homeward bound indeed was Mrs. Trumbles. She lived (if you wish to know) at the turnpike gate at Potter's Corner, where for many years she had kept house for her brother Joe Griffin, the turnpike man, ever since the time when her husband, the late Mr. Trumbles, had trumbled out of this world in consequence of green gooseberries, his partiality for which, in cholera times, had proved his ruin, and left Martha a widow in the prime of life. That was a jolly place though, that turnpike-house, and a comfortable home withal. There were several coaches on the road in those good old days—regular four-horse coaches, with coachman, guard, and horn all complete, spanking along the road as merry as need be, and showing its passengers something of the scenery of the pleasantest county in England. Now-a-days there is no such thing; you jump into a carriage without any horses to it, instead of the

cheerful sound of the guard's horn, you hear a shrill screech, which sets all your teeth on edge and makes your blood run cold, and then off you go puffing and blowing through the country, too fast to catch any of the pretty views, and all on a dead level, which is the reverse of interesting. No wonder that the railroad was afraid to come through the lovely line of the old London and Folkestone road, and went round through the Weald for very shame, as if it hadn't the heart to cut up the old country or invade and desecrate the route of the good stage-coaches.

However, it is no use mourning after the days that are gone, which is a regular old-fashioned English habit, of which I ought to be ashamed. In those days there were plenty of carts and vans besides the coaches to make the turnpike-house cheerful and lively, and so Martha Trumbles always found it. Her brother, Joe Griffin, was what you might call a cheery customer, who took his tolls with a joke, had a merry word for each passing traveller, and enjoyed his life as a respectable turnpike-gate keeper should do. Indeed, he was commonly known in the neighbourhood by the friendly and complimentary titles of "Merry Joe Griffin" and "Honest Joe Griffin;" and I have every reason to believe that he entirely deserved both epithets. So, as I said, it was a cheerful, pleasant home enough, towards which good Martha Trumbles was plodding—or rather splashing—her way. Not that any home would look particularly pleasant on such a day as that was, unless you regarded it in the special light of a refuge and shelter from the downpouring rain.

Perhaps it was in this point of view that Martha

looked at the matter when, as she neared the wood in her road from Ashford, she exclaimed in a voice somewhat hoarse from damp, "Drat the wet! I wish I was safe indoors aside the kitchen fire, that's what *I* wish!" and halted for a moment to take breath before she ascended the hill upon which Potter's Corner woods begin. At that instant her attention was attracted by a kind of laugh, which seemed to proceed from some one not very far from her, and looking up, she perceived a little old man comfortably seated on the top of the milestone, who, with one eye closed, was regarding her with the other, evidently much amused at something or another.

"Well, sir," she remarked, as soon as she had discovered from whence the sound came, "and I hope you likes yourself there on the top of the milestone, though what the fun can be of sitting there all alone in the wet is more nor I can say, let alone laughing and staring at a poor widder woman as is making the best of her way home this weary, wet day, which my name is Martha Trumbles, and there ain't no call to laugh that I can see."

As she spoke, the good woman looked steadily at the stranger, and before she had finished her speech began to see that she was certainly in the presence of no ordinary being. He was a little—a very little—gentleman, not much over three feet high, and, moreover, was dressed in a fashion which appeared somewhat peculiar, especially considering the weather. He had on evening shoes with large silver buckles, tight breeches and long black silk stockings, whilst a waistcoat embroidered with ancient lace, a coat of black velvet with golden braid, and a cocked hat,

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such as is worn by Ministers of State at Court ceremonies, completed his strange costume. And as worthy Martha Trumbles finished her speech, the little man laughed loudly once more, and tucking up his legs under him with a sudden jerk, sat, squatting cross-legged like a Chinaman, on the top of the milestone.

"Wet weather, Mother Trumbles, wet weather," said he in a merry tone, and as the good dame looked at him again, she perceived that the wet seemed to run off his clothes without leaving a mark or stain, and that in the midst of that heavy rain the little man seemed as dry as a bone all the while.

"Well, I never!" cried she, after a moment's observation. "Never in all my born days did I see sich a sight. Why, sir, you b'an't wet not a bit, in all this here rain! I never did!"

"Didn't you, Mrs. Trumbles?" returned the little man, "that's because you don't know what a good tailor I have got;" and again he laughed pleasantly.

Now Mrs. Trumbles felt very curious with regard to who or what this strange person might be, but, curious as she was, the weather was terribly against gossiping, and she began to be anxious to get home. So she took up her basket again, for she had set it down in the road for an instant, and was about to trudge on, when the gentleman on the top of the milestone once more addressed her.

"Will you do me a kindness, Mrs. Trumbles?" said he; and the good woman never hesitated for a moment in her reply.

"To be sure I will, sir," she answered; "if so be it is within my power to do so."

"That it is," returned the other, "or be sure I wouldn't ask you. Please to wheel my wheelbarrow up the hill for me."

Martha Trumbles looked about, and sure and certain there stood a smart wheelbarrow, rather undersized, on the other side of the milestone, painted dark blue with a red wheel, and apparently empty. The first thought which struck the good lady was, that for a man to ask a woman to help him up the hill with his wheelbarrow seemed to be rather reversing the proper order of things, and that it would have been rather better taste if he had offered to carry her basket instead. But when she looked again and saw what a puny little fellow he was, and so nicely dressed too, evidently unaccustomed to wheelbarrow work, and certainly not strong enough to do much of it, her kindly heart inclined towards the little gentleman, and she thought she might as well do a good-natured act, and help him according to his request. So she went up to the wheelbarrow, and as she did so, she said to the small gentleman, "Well, sir, it a'n't a job as I knows much about, but it *do* seem to me as how you'd never get that ere barrow up the hill this side of Christmas, and if so be as I can help you, I don't know but what I'll be found willing to do it!" So saying, she stooped down to take hold of the barrow and began to wheel it off, when all of a sudden, with one spring, the little man leapt into it, and seated himself there as comfortably as possible.

"Hoity-toity!" cried honest Martha; "why, whatever are you about, sir? Do you think I'm a-going to wheel you as well as your barrow up the hill?

Good gracious me! I never heard tell of such a thing!"

"Dear Mrs. Trumbles—young Mrs. Trumbles—pretty Mrs. Trumbles—*please* do as I ask you," said the little man in a wheedling tone; "my shoes are quite new, and *so* thin, it will be *so* kind of you if you will save them from being spoiled, and I assure you that you will never have cause to repent your good-nature!"

Now it was many years since Martha Trumbles had been called young and pretty, and I am not prepared to say that, strictly speaking, she was either the one or the other. Perhaps for this reason the words of the speaker went more directly to her heart. At all events, though she did not give in without declaring that she should never be able to do it, and "wondered what a gentleman like him could mean by asking a poor woman like her to trundle him up the hill in a barrow as if he was a clothes-basket," she did at last consent to undertake the task, and, hanging her basket on one of the handles of the wheelbarrow for convenience, she began slowly and steadily to make her way up the hill with her burden. The little man was not so *very* heavy, either, and fortunately the hill was not particularly steep, so she got on pretty well, though now and then she was obliged to stop and rest. Still the rain went steadily on, and her umbrella, which she had been forced to put down across the front of the wheelbarrow, could now be of no more use to her. At last, the wheel getting into a rut jolted the barrow violently, upon which its occupant shrieked aloud in great alarm, "Take care, Mother Trumbles! oh *please* take care! they're tumbling out! they're tumbling out!"

"*What* are tumbling out, sir?" asked the astonished Martha, who could see nothing else in the barrow save and except the little gentleman himself, who appeared perfectly safe and comfortable.

"Well, dame," replied he, "I think I must let you into a bit of a secret. People are very poor hands at talking in this part of the world, and travellers by this road who begin to converse constantly drop the conversation. These conversations I have to collect once a year, and this happens to be the day. A precious sight of trouble it gives me! I can't bear now to hear anybody make an observation, and if a fellow lets fall a remark I view him at once as a personal enemy. This barrow is full of conversations, which you would find much more weighty if nine-tenths of the world didn't generally speak without thinking. But the year's trouble is nearly over now, and you have helped me out with it in a manner which I shall never forget!"

Martha heard with great surprise, and couldn't understand the matter at all. At first she thought the little man was "chaffing" her, but he looked perfectly grave, and appeared evidently anxious to keep something or other from falling out of the barrow. So she made no reply, but went steadily forward, pushing the wheelbarrow before her until she reached the top of the hill; then she stopped for a moment to breathe, whereupon the little man jumped lightly from his seat in the barrow, took off his hat and made her a low bow.

"Martha Trumbles, of Potter's Corner," said he, addressing her for the first time by her Christian name "you have rendered an important service to

one who is happily able to reward it. I may as well tell you that I am no ordinary mortal, but one of those beings whom mortals do not see every day. I am, in fact, Potter, and take a particular interest in you, as living at my Corner. It is unnecessary for me to tell you the precise position which I occupy in Elfland." Here the little man drew himself up to his full height, and swelled with conscious grandeur. "Enough for you to know that it is one which enables me to help those mortals who help me. This *you* have done, as I must now inform you. Not only am I obliged once a year to collect the burden of which I have already told you, but I cannot get it up the hill without mortal aid. This it is sometimes difficult to get, and unless I *do* get it done I have no power for the whole of the following year. For the coming twelvemonth I am now safe, and I return you my hearty thanks. Thanks, however, are not sufficient to prove my gratitude. I will give you a gift which, if you use it well, will prove of inestimable value. For the next week everything which you wish out aloud shall happen to you and yours!" So saying, the speaker repeated his low bow, jumped lightly again into his wheelbarrow, and the latter, without more ado, set off all by itself as hard as it could up the sandy bank and into the wood, and was out of sight and hearing before you could have said "Jack Robinson."

Martha Trumbles stood aghast with astonishment. Never had she heard or seen such a thing in her life. She had evidently met a real fairy, or elf, or wizard, or whatever he might be, and what would come of it she couldn't think! Then, who was Potter? She had lived these many years at Potter's Corner, without

ever giving so much as a thought to the question of its name. How, when, or from whence it came, and whether there had ever been a man named Potter or not, were questions which had never entered into her head, and here all at once was a man who claimed to be the very Potter who had given his name to the place, and talked about its being "his" Corner, as if there was no doubt in the world about it. She was still some quarter of a mile from the turnpike, and the rain kept steadily falling. So as she wondered, she kept getting wetter and wetter, until all at once the thought struck her that all the wondering in the world would not get her home any the quicker, and that cold and rheumatism might possibly be the results of further delay. So she jerked up her basket upon her arm, having taken it from off the handle of the wheelbarrow at the last stoppage, and as she prepared to start off again, exclaimed in a thankful voice, "Well! I'm glad I'm well over *that* adventure! I never seed a elf before, not in all my life. Elf he was, no doubt, and a civil little gentleman too. It's well he was so friendly disposed; all the same, I wish I was safe and sound at the cottage door!" Scarcely were the words out of her mouth, than, without knowing that she had moved a single inch, Martha Trumbles found herself standing at the door of her brother's house. I need hardly tell you that she was astonished beyond measure; but this convinced her that her little friend was a man of his word, and the thought crossed her mind that something good might after all come out of this adventure. She entered the house, basket on arm, and found her brother already expecting her

arrival with some impatience, as, although her progress over the last quarter of a mile had been uncommonly rapid, her wheelbarrow work had somewhat delayed her, and it was now past tea-time.

"Why, Martha, old woman," said her brother cheerily, "you have had a wet walk of it; I should have thought you would have hurried a bit to have got out of the rain."

"Oh, Joe, Joe!" replied she, "the things I've seen and heard this blessed afternoon is such as you would never believe, not if I was to take my Bible oath to them!"

Surprised at these words, her brother began to question her as to her adventures, and on hearing all that had happened, expressed his wonder as to who Potter could be, and whether he would be as good as his word all through the week. As Martha was limited to no particular number of wishes, she had plenty of opportunities of profiting by her good fortune, and all her brother bargained for was that she should be very careful not to wish for anything which might not be for her own good or that of her friends. For, as he wisely remarked, folks are often apt to wish in such a wild and reckless manner that if their wishes came true, there would be a great many more misfortunes in the world, and not a few people would be sent to places where they had much rather not go. Martha, therefore, must keep a close guard over her words and thoughts, or the gift she had received might turn out to have worked harm instead of good. To this proposition the good woman quite agreed, and began to prepare the tea in a happy and contented spirit. She laid the cloth and put the plates and other things upon the table; and when the water

boiled and the tea was ready, she called Joe to sit down, and they both began their meal.

Presently said Joe, "There's no shrimps to-day. I wish we'd got some shrimps."

"Ah!" replied his sister, "I tried all over Ashford to-day, and there was none to be had. I wish I could get some for you, Joe!" The words had not fairly left her mouth before clatter, clatter was heard in the chimney, and down came lumbering a great jackdaw. For all that he had come down by that strange passage, he brought no soot into the room, but in his beak he held a plate full of deliciously clean and fresh-looking shrimps, which he popped down upon the tea-table immediately before Martha, and, giving a friendly caw, flew back up the chimney before the pair had recovered from their surprise. They looked first at the shrimps, then at the chimney, and then at each other, and it was some seconds before they could sufficiently recover themselves to speak. Then said Joe, "Well, this *is* a go!"

"Lack-a-daisy," said Martha, "who'd ha' thought it!"

And then, since the question was not so much one of thinking as of eating, they fell to, timidly at first, but afterwards with greater confidence, upon the shrimps, which they found so excellent that they left not a single one upon the plate, but made, as they declared, the best tea they had ever eaten in their lives! No sooner, however, had they finished their repast than they began to talk over the affairs of the day, and to indulge in all kinds of fancies and guesses about the little old gentleman.

"Why," said Joe Griffin, "he must be a wondrous powerful fairy, if fairy he be, to give you everything

you wish for for a whole week. I suppose you'll be wishing for poor Tom Trumbles back again, shan't you, sister ?"

Martha hereupon gave a little shriek and exclaimed, "Oh, deary me, Joe, I declare you give me quite a turn ! Far be it from me to wish the poor dear man back again in this world of woe ! No doubt he's far happier where he is—and oh the sufferings of him after them unripe gooseberries ! I wouldn't for anythink have to see it all over again !"

Joe said nothing, but knowingly winked his eye at the cat in the corner, and thought that Martha was quite right, for there had been certain rumours as to the deceased Trumbles connected with brandy-bottles and occasional rows which it was by no means desirable to revive, and he never doubted for a moment that his sister judged rightly. Then he began to ask her what she thought she should wish for, and they talked matters over for a long time before she could settle upon anything. At last they agreed that it would never do to be in a hurry about such an important matter, and they had better go to bed and see whether any fortunate suggestion would occur to either of them in the night, which wise plan they accordingly followed.

The next morning beamed fresh and fair, and Martha Trumbles was up and about her business in good time. She swept and "tidied" the house, made the beds, and bustled about as usual until it was time to get breakfast ready, to which meal she and her brother sat down with appetites but little affected by their good tea the previous evening. They soon began to talk over the curious business of Potter and his wheelbarrow, and

Joe Griffin asked his sister if she had made up her mind as to anything particular for which to wish.

"It is a good job," said he, "that the old chap didn't keep you to three wishes, like the man in the story."

"What story?" asked Martha.

"Why," replied her brother, "don't you recollect the man who had three wishes given him, and first he wished for black puddings for supper; then, in a fit of passion with his wife, he wished that the black puddings might be fastened to her nose; and afterwards, in common justice to his old woman, there was nothing for it but to waste his third chance in wishing they might fall off again—so *he* didn't get much by the business!"

"Well," cried honest Martha, "depend upon it I won't be so foolish as *that* comes to, Joe; I've a many thoughts about wishing, but, wait a bit, man, till I've thought it over a bit more."

As she spoke, the merry sound of the guard's horn came ringing through the wood, and the Folkestone coach bustled up at a goodly trot, old Richardson, the driver, having his four nags well in hand, and looking and feeling (no doubt) as proud upon his box as any monarch on his throne. Now, as there was a cross-road at Potter's Corner, leading one way to Westwell and the other to Great Chart, it was the custom for the coach always to pull up at the turnpike whenever there was any message or parcel for one place or the other. So as Richardson drove up this morning he slackened his pace when he approached the turnpike, and called out to Joe Griffin, who had risen from breakfast and stood in the doorway to see the coach pass.

"Good morning, honest Joe," said he; "here is a parcel to drop for Squire Toke at Godinton—catch it, will ye?" And, suiting the action to the word, he tossed the turnpike keeper a brown paper parcel. Unfortunately, however, Joe Griffin was not much of a cricketer, and in his anxiety to catch the parcel safely he tripped as he stepped forward, and though he saved himself by catching hold of the broom which, fixed upright in the ground, served the joint purposes of scraper and door-mat to his house, he unluckily managed to let the parcel fall into the road, which, as you may suppose, was particularly wet and muddy from the effects of the rain on the previous day.

"You clumsy dog!" shouted Richardson from the box; "why, what a butter-fingered chap it is! You a'n't no better than an old cow at catching!"

Now Martha stood by whilst all this happened, and hearing what the coachman said, thought, like a good sister as she was, that she was bound to say something for her brother, who was just stooping down with a rueful look to pick up the soiled parcel, and seemed to have nothing to say for himself.

"Cow, indeed!" she exclaimed in evident wrath. "Cow yourself, Mr. Richardson, for throwing the parcel down so carelessly! Keep a civil tongue in your head, sir—do! Cow, forsooth! I wish you was in the puddle alongside the parcel, that's what *I* wish!"

Little did Martha think of the effect which her words would produce. In another instant Richardson lay, spluttering with fury, in the biggest puddle before the door of the cottage. Now Richardson was a man very particular about his dress. His hat was always brushed with special care, the scarf round his neck

tied with those elaborate folds only known to stage-coachmen, and now dying out—or died out—with that respectable race; his bottle-green coat with huge brass buttons, only surmounted by a huge drab overcoat on wet days—all these, not to mention his brightly-polished boots, pointed to the conclusion that the worthy man was rather a dandy than otherwise. And here he lay—his hat having rolled off several feet, to its own considerable damage—the bottle-green coat splashed, or rather daubed, with mud from shoulder to tail—his new scarf defaced with the same material—and, altogether, presenting the most distressing spectacle of a dethroned coachman which the world ever witnessed. Joe Griffin, horrified and amazed at the downfall of such a dignitary, offered to help him up as well as he could. The enraged coachman, however, would have none of his assistance, but, scrambling up and gathering himself together, in mingled terror, surprise, and fury, turned upon Martha in a state well nigh frantic. For a moment he could hardly recover his speech, but having passed a very muddy arm twice across his face (a process by which the beauty of the latter was in no way increased), he appeared to be rather more equal to the occasion.

"Oh, you witch!" he cried, shaking his whipless hand at her, for his whip lay by his side in the road. "Oh, you vile deceiving hag, to treat an old friend like this! What do you mean by it, you thief—you bad, wicked woman? Is this the way you treat a stage coachman?" And he stopped as if he had lost his breath from rage.

Martha, meanwhile, was nearly as much shocked

and alarmed as himself, for never had she given a moment's thought to the possible effects of her wish, or to the wondrous power of Potter. Her woman's wit, however, came to her rescue directly, and before Richardson could utter another syllable she hastily exclaimed, "Oh dear me, Mr. Richardson, how sorry I am for your accident! I never thought of sich a thing, sir, indeed, or never had I uttered them words, but sooner bust with silence where I stood. I wish you was on your box again as smart as ever, with a new hat on your head as well—that I'm sure I do!"

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth when the astonished Richardson found himself again upon his seat; his coat, scarf, and face perfectly clean; his own, or a better, hat fixed firmly upon his head, and not a trace left of the extraordinary accident which had just befallen him. The well-behaved horses had never moved, and, gathering up the reins without difficulty, there sat the worthy coachman just as if nothing had happened.

"Dash my buttons!" said he (which, as they had been tolerably well dashed in the mud already, would have appeared unnecessary but for the wondrous recovery which they and their master had just undergone). "As sure as my name is Dick Richardson, this is the strangest thing as ever happened to me in all my born days!"

"I don't know what you're a dashing your buttons about," said the gruff voice of a passenger from behind, "but I don't think much of a coachman who jumps off his box at every turnpike, and hinders the journey like you're a doing of. I wants to be at

Maidstone, and if you dawdle like this, I don't know when that will come to pass."

These words recalled Richardson to a sense of his duty, so, without any more delay, he smothered his wonder for the time, whipped his horses, and bowled off along the road at a good pace, leaving Joe Griffin and Martha standing outside their cottage door watching the fast retreating coach. When it was quite out of sight, and not till then, they both re-entered the cottage, and after talking over the strange occurrence in which they had both played a part, went about the performance of their household duties as usual. All the morning, however, Martha Trumbles kept turning over and over in her mind the wonderful things which had happened to her during the last four-and-twenty hours, and considering how she could make the best use of the extraordinary gift which had been bestowed upon her. Many thoughts crossed her mind only to be thrown aside, so fearful was she of making some fatal mistake; and so it came about that dinner-time arrived without her having spoken out aloud a single wish of any sort or description. That day the two worthy occupants of the turnpike cottage had got for dinner a piece of beef-steak, which, washed down by a draught of good Kentish beer, was no bad meal for hungry folk; and as they sat enjoying themselves at their mid-day repast, you could scarcely have found two more contented people. However, as dinner came to an end, Joe Griffin brought up the subject of Potter once more, and again they discussed the question as to what Martha had better wish for. Whilst they were talking, there came a knock at the door, and in came old deaf Dawkins, a neighbour who lived

across the road, and oftentimes dropped in for a chat at that time of day, sometimes going so far as to have a pipe with Joe Griffin in the arbour of the little garden which was attached to the cottage. Dawkins was always welcome, and the three soon entered into a pleasant conversation enough about the weather, the crops, and their neighbours' affairs, these being the three favourite subjects of conversation with gossiping Englishmen and Englishwomen. After a while Martha could not help beginning to tell the newcomer of her strange adventures, in spite of sundry nods and winks from Joe, who appeared to think it somewhat of a private and family affair, which had better be kept quiet. But that wouldn't suit worthy Martha at all; no, she was in for a good gossip, and tell her news she would. Dawkins listened, as the saying is, with all his ears, but as these were, as I have already said, not very serviceable, he could not readily comprehend the story, and kept interrupting Martha with questions which annoyed her not a little.

"Where was it?" the old man asked; "where was it the gentleman was sitting? On a windmill, did you say?"

"No, no," replied Martha, "on a *milestone*."

"Ah! I see," returned he, "on a tombstone: but how come there a tombstone on the Ashford road?"

"*Milestone*, stupid!" cried Martha, and went on with her story again.

"And what did you say his name was?" asked the tiresome questioner.

"Potter," replied Martha.

"Oh, Rotten; what an odd name! Rotten!" and he

chuckled to himself with provoking certainty that he had got it all right now.

"No!" shrieked Martha at the top of her voice, "Potter! P-O-T—pot, T-E-R—ter, *Potter!*"

"Ah, I hear now," returned the other, "Bottle—and a very good name, too. Well, and what did Bottle say next?"

At this Martha lost all patience. "Bother you and your deafness," cried she, "I wish you were both at Jericho, that I do!"

The words were scarcely spoken when the unhappy Dawkins disappeared through the window, and Martha, horrified at what she had done, gave a loud scream and dropped down on the floor in a faint. Joe Griffin, who was also terribly alarmed, seized his sister round the waist, raised her up, plumped her into an arm-chair, dashed half a pail of water in her face, and slapped her back vigorously.

These powerful remedies having restored the good woman to her senses, she began to cry and sob bitterly. "Oh dear, oh dear!" she said, "to think that I should go and do such an ill turn to mortal man, let alone neighbour Dawkins, so quiet and friendly as he has always been. Poor dear man! how *could* I go to do it. I wish with all my heart he was back again in that chair."

She spoke, and looked at the chair, hardly daring to hope that her wish could be fulfilled this time, and indeed it was not until after the lapse of several seconds that anything was to be seen, for it takes a certain time to get from Jericho to England even when you travel by Fairy Telegraph, which I suppose was the manner of poor Dawkins' journey. Be that as it may,

however, it was not long before the eyes of the brother and sister were gladdened by the sight of their old friend sitting safe and sound again in the same chair which he had previously occupied. He looked somewhat scared, to be sure, but there was nothing else the matter with him, and after a little time he found his voice, and began to talk again as happily as ever. Martha was very anxious to know where he had really been and what he had seen, but he couldn't tell her much, except that it was very hot and there were lots of palm-trees, which proved it to be Jericho at once. The good man, however, had been taken there almost without knowing he had moved, and Martha's second wish had left him so little time for observation that he could really tell very little about the place or the country. Afterwards, however, he took to telling stories about what had happened to him when at Jericho, by which you would have thought he must have stopped there for a month at least, and he was always looked upon in those parts as a travelled personage, and one who possessed much knowledge upon all questions connected with foreign parts. So cheaply and easily is a reputation gained, and so willing are people to believe what they hear without full and careful inquiry.

As the afternoon wore away, neighbour Dawkins went home, and Martha thought she would walk as far as Ashford, in order to fetch one or two articles which she had not been able to get the day before. Just as she was about to start, her brother remarked to her, "Take your time, Martha, the weather is rather warm to-day, and you're not so young as you were, remember."

"No more I am, Joe," said she, "and I *do* feel these walks a smart deal more nor what I used. I wish I'd got a nice strong pony to carry me and my basket to and from the town." No sooner did she speak thus, than round the corner of the house came a beautiful iron-grey pony, stout and strong enough to have carried two Marthas, and with a quiet kindly look about the eyes which made her love him directly. He had a comfortable-looking side-saddle on his back, and good strong reins round his neck, and in fact, as Martha afterwards remarked, there he was, right and ready as if he had been made to order then and there —a very duck of a pony. More than this, too, across his back were a pair of panniers, in which, better than in her basket, anything could be carried which Martha might purchase in Ashford, and they were so arranged that, contrary to common panniers, they didn't in the least interfere with her riding very comfortably upon the saddle. I need hardly describe to you the delight with which Joe and his sister beheld this new treasure.

"Martha Trumbles," said that good person, addressing herself with much solemnity, "you are now a happy woman! No more walkings and wettings and wearyings and worryings, but ride like a lady you can, and blessings on Potter for the gift he gives you. Deary me, I wish I could see him to thank him for it!"

"Well, Mother Trumbles! here I am, what do you want?" immediately cried a merry voice, and, looking up, there sat Potter, perched on the top of the turnpike gate, and apparently quite as much at home there as upon the milestone. He was dressed just as he had been when Martha first saw him, and was laughing and winking just the same.

"Oh, sir, oh dear, Mr. Potter!" cried Martha, "pray let me thank you for this be-e-e-a-a-utiful pony!"

"Is that all?" laughed the individual addressed. "Why that's a trifle to what I can do for my friends —just you try me, that's all. But take care you wish wisely, for the gift I have given you may do harm as well as good, unless properly used. And don't go calling for me again unless you really want me!" and with these words he swung himself off the gate and ran into the wood without another syllable, before Joe, who was making up his mind to accost him, had settled what to say or even how to begin.

However, although Potter was gone, there was the pony, safe and sound; and Martha determined to make use of it at once. So she mounted the little animal, proud as a peacock with his tail spread, and, wishing her brother goodbye, went on her way to Ashford town.

As her pony walked jauntily along the road, several neighbours whom she met took notice of his appearance, and wondered where good Mistress Martha could have found money to purchase so clever an animal. Most of them, I fancy, began to think that Joe Griffin must have a pretty good berth of it at the turnpike, and that it was to his savings and kindness that his sister owed the pony. She put him into a trot presently, but this shook her rather, not being used to it, so she fell back upon walking, and got safely to Ashford. There she came across more friends and acquaintances, and was much pleased at the respect they paid her—so much difference does it make to some people's manner whether they are speaking to a

person on horseback, or a mere tramper through the mud on his own legs. I am sorry to say that this respect set our Martha thinking how pleasant it was to be so treated, and how nice it would be to be rich enough to command (as she thought she then would) even greater marks of attention. However, she had no time to give way to such thoughts just then, for there was her shopping to do, and her pony to look after as well. So she got through her business as well as she could, being only surprised that when she said to Worger the grocer, "I wish you would let me have that butter twopence a pound cheaper," he instantly agreed to her proposal, and when she observed to Hayward the butcher that she wished she "could take that nice little neck of mutton for nothing," he presented it to her immediately with a low bow, and even helped to pack it into one of her panniers with his own hands. No extraordinary wish, however, fell from her during the afternoon, and when she had done all she had to do, she turned her pony's head homeward and set off. Deeply she thought as she rode, and then presently began to pat her steed and talk to him as if he was a Christian.

"Poor little chap!" she said, "you *are* a pretty pony, and as good as you are pretty, that you are! I wonder what your name is, now? I wish you could tell me."

To her intense surprise and affright, the pony turned his head half round immediately upon her last speech, and replied in as good English as ever she had heard—"Trotter, Mrs. Trumbles, at your service!"

At this Martha gave a little scream, and very nearly tumbled off her saddle into the road.

"Why, goodness gracious me," she cried, "what a man that Potter is, sure-ly! The very ponies speaks for him! Who'd ha' thought it! Well!" and then thinking she might as well get some more news from Trotter, she asked him, "And where do you come from, you pretty creature?"

"Fairy land," replied Trotter, and then added with a neigh, "and I like oats."

"Lack-a-daisy me!" said Martha. "Did any one ever hear tell of such a thing! A pony that speaks like a human, and tells you to your face that he likes oats! Howsumdever, most ponies does the same, I reckon, for the matter of that," and with these observations she proceeded on her way, being rather afraid to talk any more with her strange animal.

When she got home, her brother came out to meet her, and was very glad to hear that the pony had turned out so well. A new difficulty, however, now presented itself, in the absence of any stable or outhouse to the cottage, in which the precious animal could be bestowed, who, whilst his master and mistress discussed the matter, stood there pawing the ground somewhat impatiently, and improving the opportunity given him by Martha's aid, by constantly exclaiming, at intervals of a few seconds, "I like oats."

"Oh, dear me!" at last cried Martha, "I don't see what's the use of a horse without a stable. I wish we'd got a nice little stable, with hayloft and all complete."

In another moment there stood the exact thing for which she had wished, and a prettier, neater, more compact little building you would not wish to see. Joe was delighted, and put the pony up at once, after

which Martha wished for oats, and the little animal had the pleasure of making a plentiful supper of his favourite food. The brother and sister then went in to tea, and had hardly sat down before they again began to discuss all that had happened.

"Martha," said Joe, "there is one day gone out of your week, and I don't know as you've made the most of it!"

"*I* don't know as I have, Joe," returned she. "But anyhow there a'n't no harm done, now Dawkins has come safe back; and as for Mr. Richardson, you saw for yourself that he went off with his hat and coat as good as new."

"Yes," said Joe, thoughtfully, "*that's* all right enough, but them wishes was silliness to my mind, and I wish they hadn't been wished. If we only knew what was best to wish, now."

"Well," observed his sister, "we might call dear Mr. Potter, and ask him to tell us."

"Not for worlds!" cried Joe, "the good gentleman particularly told us, if you recollect, *not* to call for him unless we really wanted him, and we can't say it is quite so bad as *that* now, since we ought to be able to know for ourselves what we want. Besides, I have been told that fairies and such-like don't fancy being called and bothered by mortals, and we might make Potter our enemy before we knew where we were."

Convinced by this remark, Martha made no further suggestion of the same kind, and at their usual hour the two good people retired to rest. The next day brought with it its ordinary round of duties. The Folkstone coach came and went as usual, and neither Dandy Richardson nor Wallace, his brother coach-

man, met with any such unpleasant adventure as had occurred to the former on the previous morning.

Martha went bustling about her business as happily as possible, although she could not stay long away from the new stable, whither she hurried at an early hour to visit "Trotter," not feeling quite sure that he might not have vanished in the night, as suddenly as he had appeared. This, however, was not the case, and there was the little animal, safe and sound. There, too, was the stable and hayloft, as nice a little building as you need wish to see, and the few neighbours who lived about Potter's Corner called in during the day to congratulate Joe Griffin on the improvement he had made in his little place, and wondered how he had managed to get it done so quickly, before any of them had observed that he had even begun to build it. Joe took it all very quietly, being of opinion that "least said is soonest mended," although he was rather annoyed at their congratulations upon the subject of the pony, being afraid he would now be thought to be a much richer man than he was, which (as he was wise enough to know) is always a misfortune to anybody.

Nothing particular occurred until the afternoon, when Martha had occasion to go and draw some water from the well, and feeling rather tired after she had begun to do so, said out aloud to herself, "Oh dear, oh dear! this is weary work; how I wish the well would draw up the water by itself without all this trouble."

Instantly, to her great surprise, the well took the matter into its own hands, round and round turned the handle, apparently all by itself, the bucket was

filled, and her wants supplied without further exertion. I believe that if the truth were told, this delighted Martha Trumbles more than anything that had yet happened to her, for this drawing water from the well had always been a tiresome and weary operation, and to find that she could get it done without any trouble was a very great subject of rejoicing. So she sang gaily as she went back to the house with her water-pails, and told her brother with great joy that she had found another good way by which she could turn Potter's gift to account. So passed off the second day of the wishing week without further occurrence worth noting, and the next day was Sunday. Joe Griffin could not leave his gate, but worthy Martha got ready for church according to custom. She had made herself as tidy as she could, and was just about setting off, when the thought came into her head that her bonnet and shawl looked rather shabby, and she could not help observing, as she came downstairs—

"I wish I had got a new bonnet and shawl to go to church in, but I don't know how to afford it."

This thought need not have troubled her much, for as soon as she had expressed the wish, a smart new bonnet replaced the old one upon her head, and her former shawl gave place to one which to her eyes was truly magnificent. Although she had almost left off being surprised at the multitude and variety of Potter's gifts, she could not restrain a little shriek of joy, and immediately hastened to tell Joe of her good luck. He was very glad to hear of it, but suggested that as she was about wishing, she might have remarked that *his* coat was somewhat the worse for wear, and that a new hat would be by no means a

mistake in *his* case. Martha was perfectly ready to oblige him, and before she marched off to church, had the satisfaction of seeing her brother much improved in the appearance of his outer man.

These transactions would have made the good woman very late for church, if she had not happened to exclaim on the road thither, "Oh dear, I *hope* I shall be in time!" and accordingly, somehow or other, the service did not begin until she had taken her seat. After church, several people, who had heard that something extraordinary had happened to Martha (though they hardly knew what), came up, and began to ask her concerning the strange reports which were current in the village. Martha hardly knew what to do, being fearful that if she disclosed the whole truth, Potter might perchance be offended and deprive her of the wishing power, even if the case did not bring her into trouble before the magistrates on the score of witchcraft. For she knew well enough that witches and wizards had always been plentiful in Kent (witness the Wizard of Bockhanger in very ancient days, and the Witch of Brooke Hollow in more modern times), and that the wise Justices of the Peace had their eyes open to any proceedings which took place in that part of the world which they had any reason to suspect of being connected with the art of magic or witchcraft. For this reason she deemed it best to answer in few words and very cautiously, getting rid of the gossips as quickly as she could, and walking homewards at a quick pace. But two of her companions would by no means part with her so easily.

Widow Clements and Dame Cutbush were noted for their long tongues and love of gossip, and the

inkling they had of a real good bit of news was too strong for them to be able to resist the temptation of sifting the matter to the bottom. So they followed poor Martha closely, and asked her question upon question, which she found the greatest difficulty in answering without saying that which might get her into trouble. She owned to having met a kind gentleman, and she went so far as to say that he had stated himself to be connected with some of the families who owned, or had owned, the property immediately in the neighbourhood of Potter's Corner. She confessed that a stout pony had been given her as a present, and declared that she had nothing more to say upon the subject. Her caution, however, only excited the curiosity of the two women. They questioned and cross-questioned her upon every point. "What sort of a man was the kind gentleman? What was his name? Had she ever seen him before? How had she managed to make herself such a favourite with him? Had he gone away? Where was he to be found now? Was there any chance that another poor body might be equally lucky with him?" A thousand such inquiries they continued to make, until at last poor Martha fairly lost all patience, and cried out in sheer vexation, forgetful of possible consequences—

"Bless my life, how you two *do* bother a person! I wish you were both obliged to hold your tongues, that I do!"

Now, I know not whether Fairy law interprets everything quite literally, or whether in this case Potter did so for a joke, but, whereas Martha had doubtless simply had it in her heart to wish that her

two persecutors might be silent, the immediate result of her wish was carried out in a more literal manner. The instant the words had left her mouth, each of the two women seized her own tongue with her right hand, between her first finger and thumb, and held it tight —so tight that tears came into the eyes of each from sheer pain, whilst they stamped violently on the ground in rage and fury. The sight was ridiculous enough, but Martha was too much frightened to laugh. She knew well enough, however, that the instant they recovered their powers of speech they would pour upon her a torrent of abuse, which she by no means desired to encounter, and she therefore set off and ran for some twenty or thirty yards, to a place where there was a stile to cross, over which she scrambled as fast as possible, and then turning round to the two indignant women, called out as loudly as she could, "I wish you may both let go your tongues again," and having said these words, hurried forward hastily on her journey.

Dame Cutbush and Widow Clements were overpowered with surprise and rage. As soon as they found themselves free to speak again, they began to pour forth the vials of their wrath upon the devoted head of Martha Trumbles. Perhaps they had some justification for their wrath, for speech is supposed to be free in England, and no one has a right to punish another for merely boring him with questions and conversation for which he is not inclined. If it were not so, I am afraid a great many more persons would be constantly punished than is now the case in this happy country. Moreover, if anybody doubts the disagreeable nature of the punishment which these

two good women had undergone, let him, before he reads another word of this story, take his own tongue between his finger and thumb and hold it tight. It is not an easy thing to do, for the tongue is a slippery article to lay hold of, and you cannot hold it without pinching it considerably. Well, just fancy, not doing this of your own accord, but being *obliged* to do it, and that for several minutes, and you will be better able to imagine and excuse the rage and indignation which was felt by these worthy Kentish dames.

If *their* wishes had been assisted by Potter, I think Martha Trumbles would have had but a bad time of it. They wished her in places more remote and disagreeable than Jericho—they called her every bad name they could lay their tongues to—they vowed that they would denounce her as a rank witch the very first thing on the morrow, and I believe that, as a matter of fact, they both went up to Squire Toke the next morning to inform against her. But, as they told a tale in which they differed considerably the one from the other, and as the worthy squire, knowing something of his customers, probably thought that the fact of their having been obliged to remain silent for a few minutes was one not very much to be lamented, and for which the author thereof deserved praise rather than blame, he dismissed the case, and scolded them both for trying to bring a respectable neighbour into trouble by such a silly accusation. So nothing came of the business after all, and Martha heard no more of it, for the two women were ashamed to repeat a story which told so much against themselves, after their failure before the magistrate. However, when she reached her cottage, poor Martha was so

distressed at what had occurred that she positively burst into tears, and declared to Joe that she thought she had better leave off wishing altogether. Her brother, however, took a different view of the case, and told her that in his opinion the best and most sensible thing she could do was to wish at that moment for a good bit of roast beef and a plum-pudding for their Sunday dinner. To this Martha could raise no objection, and accordingly wished in Joe's very words for the things of which he had spoken, and was by no means surprised when four little men came running in at the back door, placed upon the table a prime joint of beef and a smoking hot plum-pudding, and then, without saying so much as "with your leave," or "by your leave," took *their* leave in the same manner as that by which they had entered, and were seen no more.

"Come," cried Joe, "*that* was a wish worth wishing, sister Martha; keep all your wishes to *that* tune, and we'll have such a jolly week as never was known. So saying he took his seat at the table, and they both fell to and made a hearty dinner off Potter's best gift.

The afternoon passed away quietly, as most of the days had done in that quiet home before Master Potter had interfered with his kindly intentions, and Martha's only wish was to her brother, expressed in the usual form of "Good night," which in fact was scarcely necessary, inasmuch as Joe Griffin, being decidedly of a sleepy temperament, and especially so after his evening pipe, rarely erred in the matter of sleep, generally accompanying the same with snores of a character which would infallibly have

won the first prize, if a prize for snoring had been given at the Ashford Agricultural Society; which gave prizes in those days for almost everything else that was done by an agricultural labourer, which Joe could have called himself for the occasion.

Monday brought with it no particular adventures, and passed off quietly enough until towards the evening, when Mr. Denyon, the head keeper upon the neighbouring estate, to which belonged the Potter's Corner woods, dropped in, as he said, for a neighbourly chat. Now Denyon was a man whom poachers held in awe, and at whom poor men trembled lest they should by him be deemed poachers, and treated accordingly. He was well-to-do in the world, and for years past had made a pretty thing out of the rabbits which his indulgent master allowed him to have as a "perquisite." His main object in dropping in was to inquire into the reason of the sudden appearance of stable and pony upon the turnpike premises, for, with the true instinct of a gamekeeper, he suspected all sudden prosperity to have its rise and progress in some hidden and unlawful practices connected with poaching. He determined, therefore, to ferret out the secret, and with this intention he paid a visit to Joe Griffin and his sister. A rough and burly man was Denyon, and withal no teetotaler, as you might guess from his face, and he brought in his pocket a bottle of old gin, by the aid of which he hoped to comfort the heart of Joe Griffin, and extract the secret (if secret there was) at the same time.

In he came and down he sat, and in a little while produced his bottle, whereupon Joe and he both

lighted their pipes and began to converse. Martha, who was no lover of gin, and had not, as a lady, acquired the habit of smoking, could only sit and listen attentively to the two men, which she was quite ready to do. Not being particularly fond of Denyon, Joe was not at first much inclined to impart to him the information he desired to obtain. However, a glass or two of gin had the effect which his visitor had anticipated; and before an hour had gone by, the gamekeeper knew that stable and pony had both come from the generosity of one Potter.

"Potter, Potter," he muttered to himself, "wonder who he is—no good, I'll be bound; likely, one of that Ashford lot, perhaps from the New Town;" and then he proceeded to ask sundry questions of Martha, to which she responded with some reluctance, feeling something within her which told her that the less said about Potter the better that worthy individual would be pleased.

However, at last Denyon got sufficient information out of her to feel tolerably assured that Potter was no poacher, and he then began to advise the brother and sister upon the subject of wishes.

"What fools you must be," said he, "to stay in this miserable little hole of a cottage, when a mere wish might place you in a palace!"

"Happiness is not found in palaces," said Joe Griffin gravely, quoting from a copy which he had formerly had to write out, time after time, in his copybook, when undergoing what was called education in Mr. Browning's celebrated school in the adjacent village of Mersham.

"Nonsense," returned Denyon, "that's all gammon,

and was of course said by some fellow who hadn't got a palace of his own, or any chance of getting one. To have a palace means to be rich, and to my mind if a man is rich he ought to be happy. Why shouldn't he? He can do what he likes and go where he pleases, and buy whatever he has a fancy for. I only wish *I* had your chance, that's all!"

He continued to talk in the same strain for some time, and then, having obtained all that he came for, left the cottage, and departed upon his own business.

Now although Joe Griffin had given utterance to such noble sentiments about happiness and palaces, I am bound to say that Denyon's words made a considerable impression upon him, and even more so upon Martha, so that they went to bed that night less contented than they had hitherto been with their humble position in life. Next day being Ashford market they were early afoot, for the traffic upon the road being trebly great on market days, Joe had his hands full of business. Carts were passing all day long, and sheep and cattle were driven to and fro through the gate constantly, so that Joe had to be toll-taking instead of tale-telling, and had no time for gossip with or about his sister. Many, however, were the observations made upon the smart new stable, and questions not a few were asked respecting the story which had got afloat about Martha and her good fortune. Joe parried them all, however, in a friendly, pleasant way, and got through the day as comfortably as he could have expected.

It was getting towards tea-time when he went indoors to sit down for a few minutes' rest, and found

Martha busy at her sewing. Now Martha had been pondering all day over Denyon's words, and had made up her mind to consult Joe once more upon the subject upon the first opportunity. Four whole days had passed since the Thursday on which she had encountered the famous Potter, and the fifth day was beginning to wane. According, therefore, to the best calculation she could make, she had but two more clear days during which the wishing-power would last, that is to say, up to the same hour on Thursday as that at which the power had been given in the preceding week. There was not, then, much time to lose, if she intended to wish for any substantial and permanent benefit, and she resolved to consult her brother without delay. He came in, mopping his forehead with his large red pocket-handkerchief, and threw himself down in his chair with a weary air.

"Well, Martha, old lass!" he exclaimed, "and how be you a-getting on?"

"Very well, thank you, Joe," said she.

"Haven't been a-wishing for nothing more, have ye?" said Joe with a laugh. "No shrimps, nor beef, nor nothing of that sort? Darn my old trousers, if I don't think your week will be out before you've made up your mind to wish for anything else!"

"Goodness forbid!" said Martha hastily. "Do you know, Joe, I've been bothering my head a good deal about all this business to-day, and I can't help thinking that we should be a wonderful sight happier if we was richer nor what we be. Just think, Joe, no rent to pay, no call to keep thinking whether there's enough victuals in the larder to last the day, no hard work to do, but servants to do everything for you,

and only your own pleasure and amusement to study the day long!"

Joe listened, and scratched his head. "Well, sister Martha," said he, "it *do* sound pleasant, truly, if so be as it all turned out so; I'm sure I don't know how 't would be!"

"Oh, but *I* do!" cried Martha; "I'm *sure* it would be as nice as possible, and we should be as happy as happy could be! I wish we *were* rich, with a large house and lots of money and plenty of servants at our beck and call!"

She spoke, and the effect was instantaneous; the cottage, the turnpike, the wood had disappeared, and behold a beautiful house, or rather castle, situated upon an island in the middle of a lake, from which a bridge formed its only means of communication with the land. Magnificent shrubberies, grand walks, glorious flowers met the eye at every turn; and you could not gaze for a moment without feeling that you beheld the estate of some rich and important personage. A lofty hall with gallery running round it, a spacious dining-room, a pleasant boudoir, and a large and tastefully decorated drawing-room were all here; and in the latter the astonished turnpike-gate keeper and his sister found themselves, seated in soft easy chairs such as they had never before seen or heard of, and surrounded by luxurious and beautiful furniture, the like of which they had never pictured to themselves in their wildest flights of imagination.

"My gracious me, Joe!" said Martha (for women generally get the first, and almost always the last, word, as is well known to every careful student of history);—"my gracious me, where on earth have we got to now?

"Got to, sister Martha," responded Joe; "why, this is your last wish, that's what it is, and here is another of Master Potter's gifts!"

"What, is all this *ours*, Joe?" exclaimed the astounded woman. "Do you think it really *do* belong to us?"

"I expect so," said Joe gravely; and then getting up very cautiously, they both began to move slowly about the room, touching the furniture gently as if they feared to hurt it, and looking very closely at everything in extreme wonder. Presently Martha said to her brother in a tone of awe, "Joe, do you think there's any servants hereabouts? Let's ring and see."

No sooner said than done. Joe marched to the mantelpiece, and, taking hold of the china-handled bell, could not at first make out what to do with it, but presently pulled it the right way, and produced a sounding peal. After a few seconds had passed, the door opened and a smartly dressed footman appeared —at whom both Joe and his sister gazed with much perplexity, and neither of them had the least idea what to say.

At last the footman himself took the first step:

"Did you please to ring, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, muster, I did," said Joe. "We want some victuals; let's have some."

Now neither Joe nor his sister were particularly hungry, but this seemed to him the most natural thing to say under the circumstances, and he was much relieved at hearing the man reply, "Yes, sir, dinner will be ready in a few minutes," after which he retired immediately. The brother and sister stared at each other in great doubt and amazement.

"Dinner!" cried Martha. "Why, what can the man think we want with dinner at this time o' night? It must be nigh upon seven, Joe, accordin' to my reckoning."

"I expect it is," returned her brother, "but I've heard tell that the gentry most times dines latish like, and it seems that we're gentry now, Martha—as good as the rest of them!"

Thus reassured, Martha made up her mind to eat some dinner, hungry or not, for she was determined to play her part properly, now that she had brought riches into the family. So she waited as composedly as she could until the doors of the adjoining dining-room were thrown open, and a butler, dressed according to the fashion of such dignitaries, announced in a pompous voice, "Dinner is on the table!" Scarcely knowing what to do, but being told by instinct that where food is there man should go, Joe manfully shuffled towards the door, followed closely by his sister, and they entered the dining-room together. There was a small table, laid for two, with silver plate and smart lamp thereupon, and three tall footmen drawn up in order ready to do their duty. As the turnpike-gate keeper and his sister advanced, a footman did the same towards each of the two chairs which had been placed at the table, and the pair had therefore little difficulty in getting into their seats. Here, however, their difficulties began. By the side of each was a roll, properly placed within the carefully arranged folds of a napkin, at which the brother and sister looked in utter ignorance what to do with it, until later in the repast, when, on venturing to ask for bread, the roll was discovered to Joe by the

stately butler. The appearance of the latter struck both Joe and Martha with considerable awe; a black coat and white tie being garments which in their minds were associated with high position in society. "Just for all the world like our parson!" was Joe's description of the butler in after days, and there was nothing extraordinary in the comparison. That which added greatly to the confusion of the worthy pair was the circumstance of the dinner being off the table.

"I never seed no victuals before me," so ran Joe's account, "and the chaps kept a-bringing and a-bringing of things without ever putting of 'em down on the table where a Christian man expects to see his dinner." This, as I have said, puzzled both Joe and his sister not a little, although it was by no means the worst part of their troubles. The whole scene was new to them, and no two people ever felt more completely like "fish out of water."

Having timidly accepted the first thing offered to them, which was some hot soup, both Joe and Martha began by scalding their mouths by a too rapid conveyance thereto of the same, and each choked and spluttered after the first mouthful, in a manner which would have upset the nerves of any people less dignified than a well-conducted butler and his attendant footmen. Then came fish, which, as it happened to be salmon, and there was consequently no bother about bones, the brother and sister managed tolerably well. But they were quite at a loss when sweet-breads and lamb-cutlets were handed to them, one after the other, in silver dishes, the like of which they had never seen before. Too nervous to refuse, they both helped themselves to the contents of each dish, not without

some damage to the table-cloth, on which Martha dropped half the portion which she was attempting to convey to her plate, whilst Joe managed to let a cutlet drop first on to his knee and thence upon the smart Turkey carpet. The butler meanwhile handed the wine about pretty freely, and although Martha scarcely did more than sip at her glass, not being fond of strong drink, Joe tossed it down like water, and thereby gradually acquired somewhat more confidence, and felt less astonished at the strange position in which he found himself. To be sure he committed the trifling mistake of drinking up the contents of his finger-glass and declared it was excellent water, but this was immaterial. When the dishes I have mentioned were followed by the choice of roast mutton or boiled chicken, the pair of worthies were more amazed than ever. Their single dish of meat (and not always that) at the turnpike cottage had little prepared them for the quantity and quality of the repast now before them, and when these dishes were followed by half-a-dozen larks, Joe could stand it no longer.

"Well!" he exclaimed, dropping his napkin for the tenth time upon the floor, and forgetting his fear of butler and footmen altogether, "my eye and Betty Martin, as my old mother used to say, this *is* a queer set-out. Why, here's dinner for twenty, and yet I never see a bit of it when first I set down! Is this here always the style of going on, I wonder?"

The butler coughed, and made no reply, and the footmen knew their places too well to venture upon a remark, but Martha, feeling in some degree the awkwardness of the situation, came to her brother's assistance, and observed, "Joe, dear, we're new to it

yet, you know, but bide a bit and we shall get along all right," and with sundry frowns and winks she prevented him from exposing more of his surprise and ignorance before the servants. When the latter had placed the dessert upon the table, and left the room (Joe and Martha in the meantime having again had to marvel at pudding, cream, and pastry, which were all offered to them), the two new proprietors of this fine place sat for a few moments staring at each other with astonishment and perplexity. At last Joe broke silence.

"Martha," said he, "did ever you think that gentlefolk lived like this?"

"Not justly," replied she. "But I've heerd tell they do eat and drink uncommon, and so it *must* be if they always have such a parcel of victuals to get through every day."

"And then look at the plates and dishes!" cried Joe, "I can see myself quite plain in them—silver they is, and no mistake, and must be worth a power o' money. Deary, deary me! what a chap that Potter must be, to have such things to give away!"

"Yes," replied his sister, "and a precious good job I met him as I did. But whatever are you about, Joe? you're never agoing to light your pipe in this here beautiful room, are you?"

"B'an't I, though?" returned the honest turnpike-keeper, "a room's only a room, be it where and what it may, and a pipe's a pipe, and moreover a thing without which I can't get along no ways comfortably —so here goes." And without more ado he lit his pipe and began to enjoy himself after his own fashion.

Martha made no further remonstrance, though she

felt rather hurt at the little attention which her brother paid to her wishes, through which they had obtained their present wealth. However, as she didn't mind the smell of tobacco, and knew how necessary it was to her brother's comfort, she endured the pipe as a good sister ought, and was very glad to see how much Joe seemed to enjoy himself.

Both brother and sister had eaten a much more hearty meal than they were accustomed to at that hour of the day—or night, whichever you please to call it—and the natural result was, that both fell fast asleep in their respective chairs, and snored in chorus for some considerable time. At last a knock came at the door, and there came into the room a smart lady's-maid, who, tired of waiting for her mistress, had made bold to come and see where she would like to sleep, and when she would go to bed. Martha was in a perfect maze of bewilderment. Here were more troubles for her, for how in the world should she ever be able to manage such a fine damsel as this, who was evidently twice as much of a lady as her mistress. So she did that which was probably the best thing she could have done under the circumstances, namely, gave herself over into the hands of the maid at once, and was by her conducted into a large bedroom, the size, beauty, and fittings of which increased her surprise. Everything was of blue—paper, curtains, and covers of furniture; and a very pretty room it was. Such a looking-glass as Martha had never seen, and the softest and most luxurious sofa and easy-chairs—all, in short, was fit for a Princess, and Martha felt the strangest sensations on finding that she had to make use of such magnificent things.

How she managed with her maid of course I cannot tell you, knowing very little about such things, but somehow or other she got to bed, and in spite of all the wondering thoughts which filled her brain, the fatigues of the day secured for her a good night of sound sleep. As to Joe, I believe he would have slept all night in the dining-room, if the butler hadn't woke him first, and then taken him to a comfortable bedroom, where he had not been many minutes before he turned into bed and slept like a top.

The next morning the eight o'clock bell, sounding for the servants' breakfast, woke our good friends from their slumbers. Martha could not think where she was when she opened her eyes, and did not understand what her maid meant by bringing her a cup of tea and asking at what time she would be pleased to breakfast. To her thinking it was then past breakfast time, but she said nothing of this, having resolved in her own mind that she had better keep as silent as she could, and try to learn a little of the way of gentlefolks' living before she took too much upon herself. She therefore only replied that she would breakfast whenever her brother did, which the smart maid said she would ascertain from the butler. When the latter called Joe and brought him his shaving-water, the worthy man felt quite ashamed of being still in bed, and could hardly be prevented from apologizing to his servant for not being already up and about. He was not long in dressing, however, and in a short space of time he and his sister met in the breakfast-room.

More surprises here awaited them: the pretty breakfast-service was a wonder of itself; the knives and forks very superior to the old horn-handled instru-

ments of which alone they possessed any experience; and the silver urn a perfect marvel. They managed, however, to make a pretty good breakfast, and then came the question how to spend the day. Martha was accustomed to have household work to attend to, but dusting rooms, sweeping carpets, and cleaning grates would never do now, whilst getting the meals ready was of course out of the question. Joe felt as if he ought to be on the look-out for the Folkestone coach, and it hardly seemed natural not to be taking people's turnpike-money all the morning, but this also was impossible. So they agreed that they would go out and look about the place.

Before they could do so, however, the butler respectfully informed Martha that the housekeeper wished to speak to her, and asked if she should come upstairs, or would her mistress see her in the housekeeper's room. Martha, good soul, hardly knew what to say, but being naturally of a good-natured disposition, and wishing to give as little trouble as possible, thought she should do this best by going downstairs. Accordingly she descended from the breakfast-room into the pleasant, sunny room allotted to the upper servants of the household, and in a few moments a stately dame appeared, dressed in black silk and surrounded by a dignity of her own which completely overpowered Mrs. Trumbles. The latter, however knew well enough that her safety lay in silence, and therefore said as little as possible, leaving all matters connected with the ordering of dinner and general management of the household in the hands of Mrs. Bickerton, as the housekeeper was called.

By this means she saved herself a great deal of

trouble and annoyance, and, moreover, satisfied the views and prejudices of the estimable Bickerton, who held the common and doubtless righteous opinion of persons in her high position, that it is the part and right of housekeepers and butlers to be the real and acting owners of the establishments over which they are kind enough to preside, and that any interference on the part of masters and mistresses is an act of impertinence scarce to be excused on the score of utter ignorance of the ways of the fashionable world. At all events, this was the wise course of action adopted by Martha Trumbles, and she returned to her brother ere long, well contented with herself and her proceedings.

The worthy pair then proceeded to take a walk round the shrubberies and gardens, the size and beauty of which were beyond any ideas they had ever formed of such things; there were several gardeners at work in different parts of the gardens, all of whom touched their hats respectfully to the new master and mistress, who returned the compliment with a ready simplicity: Joe touching his hat in the same manner, whilst Martha dropped a curtsey after her usual fashion, which differed slightly from the polite recognition which would have been displayed by one accustomed to good society. They passed along from walk to walk, admiring everything they saw, and still scarcely believing that it could really be their own, and if I was only able to chronicle their conversation, I am sure you would be very much amused at the curious remarks they made.

Time slipped by so rapidly that before they knew where they were they were recalled to the house by

the ringing of the great bell for luncheon. This occurred at half-past one, and as their walk had given them both good appetites, they did full justice to the plentiful repast which Mr. Spearing the butler saw duly placed upon the table. In fact, this being about an hour after his usual dinner-time, Joe forgot all about the late dinner which he would have to undergo, and ate as if he never expected to eat again, the consequence of which was that he experienced, immediately afterwards, his usual craving for a pipe, and soon seated himself upon a chair on the balcony, and began to enjoy his after-dinner smoke. He was interrupted before long by the entrance of the butler, who informed him that the steward, Mr. Rutherford. wished to see him upon matters connected with the estate. This rather puzzled Joe, for although he had entertained some idea that rich people ate and drank as much and as often as they pleased, and had a great many amusements and a vast deal of pleasure more than their poorer neighbours, it had never entered into his calculation to reflect that riches have their cares and responsibilities as well as their more agreeable occupations, and that there is no such thing in this world as perfect idle happiness, such as the poor sometimes fancy it to be in the power of the rich to enjoy.

Mr. Rutherford wanted to speak to Joe upon a number of things. In the first place there were the plans of some new cottages to inspect and decide upon. Joe had never seen an architect's plans before, but here he could make no great mistake, he thought, and only told the steward to have the rooms made big enough, so that the poor people might be comfortable.

However, the worthy steward was too precise to be satisfied with this somewhat vague order, and pressed Joe as to the size of the rooms, until, when the good turnpike keeper had, in sheer despair, made a shot at the size and told Rutherford to make them twice as big as they were upon the plan, he was informed that the expense would be very considerable, and that the cottage would really be too large to be convenient for a labourer's family. At last he gave up the job, and left it all to be settled by the steward, which was, perhaps, the best thing he could have done under the circumstances.

Then came the accounts, which Joe was expected to cast up, and give a cheque to enable the steward to carry matters on. This was a regular "settler" for honest Joe Griffin. He had never been very good at accounts, and the sum before him was altogether more than he could manage. Added to this, he had never drawn a cheque in his life, and was quite frightened at the amount demanded, though it was in reality very reasonable. He got over the difficulty as well as he could by telling Rutherford to leave the books that he might look over them at leisure, determined in the mean time to take counsel with Martha. Next there was the question of a new tenant for a vacant farm, for which there were a number of applicants, between whom the unhappy Joe was totally unable to decide, and was obliged to postpone *that* question also. Then he was asked to settle what wood should come down that year, and there was also a point connected with the felling of oak timber, respecting which Joe was profoundly ignorant. A dispute between the keeper and a neighbouring

farmer was also brought before him, and he was to make up his mind whether the latter should be prosecuted for trespass, or the former scolded for annoying him unnecessarily. Several tenants had complained that their buildings were out of repair, and ought to be "seen to" at once. An old woman had lost her cow, and sent a paper through the steward's hands begging for a subscription towards buying a new one. There was a complaint against the harriers by a non-sporting tenant, who was selfish enough to wish his wheat to grow quietly, without being ridden over by a number of persons who had no wheat of their own, and preferred galloping after a hare to attending to their business. Then followed an application from a road surveyor to dig gravel in one of the fields belonging to the estate, and a score or more of other questions, respecting which Mr. Rutherford was sorry to be obliged to trouble his employer, but which were really pressing for settlement.

Our friend Joe was completely dumbfounded. He had had no idea of any of these kind of troubles, connected with the possession of property, and began to think that it would take him a lifetime to get through them. However, something or other must be done, and matters must not be neglected. Seeing his difficulty, the faithful steward suggested a walk round the home farm, during which they could talk over the several questions with which it was necessary to deal. Accordingly Joe stumped off to see what there was to be seen, and to be asked to decide several other points of which he knew absolutely nothing.

Martha, meanwhile, had not fared very much better as far as quiet and happiness were concerned. Mrs.

Bickerton had requested her to give orders upon several subjects which were quite strange to her, and on going over the house with that estimable individual, she had been positively frightened by its grandeur and extent, and had begun to fear that she should never feel really at home in so spacious a mansion. Being resolved, however, to make the best of it, Martha went through the business manfully—or womanfully, as I should rather say—and met her brother at dinner-time with tolerable composure. As might have been expected, the hearty meal which Joe had made at half-past one had had considerable effect upon his appetite. However, the sight of so many good things tempted the honest fellow to do his best, and the natural result was that he ate a great deal more than was good for him. No particular incident occurred during dinner, which the worthy pair got through quite as well as could have been expected, and afterwards retired to the drawing-room. On the previous evening the butler had seen that they were both so fast asleep that he had not thought it necessary to ask whether they would take tea or coffee. This evening, however, he respectfully made the inquiry immediately after dinner.

"Tea or coffee!" cried Joe in great surprise; "why, what the dickens could we want with them wishy-washy stuffs after sich a dinner as we've just gobbled up?" and the butler retired with a bow and asked them no more.

When they were comfortably seated in two large arm-chairs in the drawing-room, they began to talk over the events of the day, and to compare notes as to how they had liked it. Both agreed that the place

was very grand, and the gardens and country round beautiful; but there was something, they could not tell what, which seemed wanting in their new existence. They consoled each other, however, with the reflection, that when they had had time to become accustomed to their new life it would be much better, and it *must* be a delightful thing to be free from the wants and cares of poverty. Joe then reminded his sister that her week of wishing was nearly over, and that she had better make haste and think whether there was anything wanting to complete their happiness which she could wish for before it was too late. I dare say some wise reader will say here, "Why didn't she wish, once for all, to be happy, and for her brother to be the same?" or, "Why didn't she wish to be able at once to know everything that was required to fit her for her new and exalted position?" But let me tell this young gentleman or lady (whichever it may be), that it must be recollected that Martha Trumbles was but a simple and uneducated soul, and that such wise thoughts consequently never came into her head. Besides which, too, I very much doubt whether the wish to be always happy could have been granted even by the powerful Potter; for to be happy must always depend a great deal upon oneself, and all the wishing in the world will never make a person happy whose disposition and feelings are such as to prevent such a result. At all events, Martha made no such wish, and when Joe reminded her that one day more would finish the wishing week, she looked up and down and racked her poor brains all the evening till bedtime without thinking of anything which she was quite sure it would be desirable to

wish for. The night soon passed away, and Thursday morning dawned upon the turnpike-keeper and his lucky sister. Hardly, however, had they descended the stairs and met in the breakfast-room before their troubles began. To tell the truth, Joe was not in the best of tempers, owing to his having stepped into a shower-bath out of curiosity, (never having seen one before), after he was dressed, and having pulled the string, got such a fright and ducking together as were enough to have made anybody cross. There was also another reason for his discomfort. The good living of the last two days had not been without its effect, and honest Joe, accustomed to a hard but simple life, with plain food and not more of it than he could comfortably manage, found that two dinners a day—and such dinners, too, as he had eaten—were too much for any man's health and digestion. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he felt dull, heavy, and generally uncomfortable, and Martha thought she had never seen him so much out of humour. He answered her shortly and gruffly several times, at which she became rather annoyed, and at last told him he was a surly, ill-mannered fellow. Joe replied that he was as good as she was, any day in the week, and added some insulting remarks about her age and general appearance, which so irritated her that she left the room in tears. She had no time for crying, however; Mrs. Bickerton was upon her in a moment—there was dinner to be ordered again; and, more important still, complaints to hear and settle about the servants' dinner, one of the footmen having brought back a pie to the kitchen the day before because the cook had been so

abominably careless as to have made it without sufficient gravy, and the whole body of domestics having protested against the indignity of such food as venison and rabbits being supplied to them. Were poor servants to be "put upon" like that? Ought they not to have at least beef and mutton daily, even if they dispensed with veal and chickens; and was it to be tolerated that anything should be given them so cheaply procured by their employers as rabbits? Martha began to find that other people besides the poor have their troubles, and what to do she knew not. Nor were the servants' complaints over yet—they said they had not meals enough. Breakfast at eight, bread and cheese and a glass of beer at eleven, substantial dinner at one, tea at half-past four, and meat supper at nine, was not a sufficient provision of daily food for these overworked creatures, who when at home in the cottages of their parents had probably meat two or three times a week at the most. But under the allowance of the "great house" they declared they had not enough. The lady's maid said she always felt "a sinking" about six o'clock, which could only be remedied by another glass of beer, and Jane the housemaid required a meat sandwich instead of bread and cheese at eleven. Then there was a question whether the head laundrymaid or the head housemaid ranked the highest; each stood upon her rights, and declared that *she* should go out of the room before the other, and then the under kitchenmaid appealed against the decision of Mrs. Bickerton, who had reproved her for dressing too gaily and wearing her hair in ringlets.

These were only a portion of Martha's troubles.

Mrs. Bickerton wished her to look over the house linen; then the grocer's books were extravagantly high, and had to be checked, a process which poor Martha was wholly incapable of performing; the dairymaid came to complain that the cows didn't give enough milk, and the cook that the butcher had not supplied the best joint of beef for the last Sunday's dinner; the under housemaid gave warning because she had been scolded for breaking china at the rate of a cup or plate a day through careless dusting; and the scullery-maid objected to being asked to make her own bed, which was clearly the duty of one of the housemaids. At last Martha's head got so bewildered by all these different affairs that she really did not know what to say or do. As she afterwards stated, she "felt that silly that she couldn't have said 'Bo!' to a goose"—though, for the matter of that, I could never understand the motive which should induce any person to address that particular bird in that particular manner, or what proof of wisdom would be afforded by his doing so. Be this as it may, however, there is no doubt that Martha Trumbles found herself quite unequal to the situation, and, finding it more and more hopeless, she went off to her brother in despair. She found him sitting back in an arm-chair in the business room, suffering both in mind and body. Both head and stomach had been affected by the doings of the previous day, and he had passed such a morning as had never fallen to his lot before. Rutherford's accounts had simply destroyed all the reasoning powers he had ever possessed. He could make neither head nor tail of them, and being therefore obliged to take everything for

granted, experienced the usual suspicion of being cheated, which is common to all ignorant persons under such circumstances, although it was in this case perfectly unfounded. Then there had been other troubles: the men-servants were as bad as, if not worse than, the maids. The head footman declared that twenty-eight pounds a year were beggarly wages, although supplemented by two suits of livery a year, and accompanied by tea and sugar into the bargain. To honest Joe this seemed an excellent place and positive riches to what *he* had been accustomed to, especially when he remembered the aforesaid footman as the ragged, shoeless son of a labourer in his own parish. But he did not and could not understand the change in feeling and position which comes over an individual who once enters upon the dignified position of a domestic servant, and it was useless to attempt to do so. Then Rutherford informed him that the gardener said he must have another man in the garden—four men and a boy, with occasional help when wanted, not being enough for four acres of flower and fruit garden. There was another helper, too, wanted in the stables, and the keeper had requested more assistance in the woods, so that expenses were increasing on every side, to which it was necessary that the master should give his attention. So when Joe Griffin was joined by his sister, he had arrived at a state of mind which was perfectly miserable, and followed her into the luncheon-room with a dejected look very unlike his usual jovial expression of countenance. The brother and sister felt rather awkward, moreover, after their morning quarrel, and walked into the dining-room and sat down in

moody silence. When the servants had left the room, they neither of them spoke for a few seconds, until Martha presently remarked—

"You don't eat nothing, Joe."

"No," replied he with a sigh, "I don't feel noways right, somehow; I don't know what ails me."

"No more don't I feel not just the thing," said she; "I think 'tis all this here bother!"

"Bother, indeed," returned Joe; "here have I been all this blessed morning a-fretting and a-worreting over them papers and things, and a'n't no wiser nor what I was afore. 'Tan't for the like of us to have sich things put upon us, and that's the Gospel truth!"

"Well, I don't know as it isn't," said Martha; and then added, after a pause, "and bother enough have I had too, which no one can deny it; the ways and the tantrums of them servants is awful for to think of, and as to going on with it day after day, I'm sure I can't tell how it is to be done not nohows!"

Both remained silent for a few moments longer, and then Joe continued, "Hap I was cross with you this morning, Martha, but I did feel so mortal queer; I don't know as ever I felt worser."

"Ah, Joe! never mind," replied Martha. "No call to think on anything you said; though years and years as we have lived together, ever since poor Trumbles was took off, and to think we never had not so much as a cross word together not till now!"

"So it is, Martha," gravely returned Joe. "So it is; there wasn't room for quarrelling not in our own little turnpike place, was there?" and here he heaved a sigh.

"No more there was, Joe; no more there was," remarked Martha. "Ah! them was happy days, for we hadn't half nor yet a quarter of the worries and troubles that seem to be here; there a'n't no end to 'em now, as far as *I* can see. Ah, Joe, I wish we was back again in the old turnpike cottage just as we was afore ever I had my wishing-week given me!" She spoke—and in one single moment her wish was fulfilled. The great house and all its grandeur had disappeared; there was the cottage, the road, the turnpike-gate just as it was of old, and Joe and Martha found themselves seated in two chairs by their own fireside; neither more nor less than they had been on the previous Thursday, before Martha's celebrated meeting with the generous Potter.

For a few seconds they stared at each other in silent astonishment; then Joe stretched out his hand, took hold of his sister's, and gave it a hearty shake.

"Back again, old lass," he cried, "back again we are, and I feel as happy as a turnpike trustee! Dash my wig if I don't feel inclined to let everybody go through without paying to-day! Hooray, Martha! No more stewards, no more accounts, no more servants! Hooray!" and Joe took off his hat and tossed it up to the ceiling with delight.

Never did mortal man so much rejoice at being changed from rich to poor as honest Joe Griffin at that moment. Martha remained silent for another moment, and then joined in.

"Joe," she said, "I do believe you are right to be glad at what has happened. We wasn't—no, we wasn't fit for that 'ere fine house and them riches, and what's more, I don't think we should ever have been happy,

with all there was there to bother our heads and hearts every day of our lives. But there is a good hour or more yet before my wishing-week is over, and though we haven't got so much out of it as I thought hap we might, I *should* like to see Mr. Potter again and thank him for his kindness." As soon as she had pronounced these words, the door opened, and there, before their eyes, clad as usual, stood the mighty Potter.

"Well, Martha Trumbles," said he, "so you want to see me again? Has everything gone right with you? If not, you have another hour in which you can still have your wishes granted!"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Martha, "I only wanted to thank you for your goodness, sir, and if you please, I don't want nothink else only to live here happy and comfortable and contented with Joe!"

"Martha," returned the little gentleman, in a cheerful tone, "you show yourself to be a sensible woman, for nothing is so sure to make a person happy as a contented spirit. Those who are always wishing to change their state of life, and for ever comparing themselves with others whom they fancy to be better off than themselves, are *never* happy. It is safer to compare yourself with the multitudes who are *worse* off than you. It was hardly to be expected that all your week's wishes would be wise, and, to tell you the truth, I only wonder that they were not more foolish than has been the case. You wished, as I guessed you would, to be rich; but now you know that rich people have a great many cares and troubles, about which the poor know nothing, and that riches cannot, of themselves, make or keep happiness for any one. The poor have to labour with their hands, the rich

have to work with their heads, and happiness is not confined to one station or one rank of life. And you may learn from what has occurred, Martha Trumbles, that there is nothing so foolish as to be discontented with your own position, and to keep wishing for something which you have not got. Depend upon it, everybody has what is best for them to have; and the way to be happy is to go on steadily and straightforwardly doing the duties which lie in your path to be done, and to cherish all the while a thankful and contented spirit. For my part, you are very welcome to the little good which *I* may have been able to do you, and I have much pleasure in wishing you a very good morning." So saying, with a graceful bow and smile, he withdrew, and was seen no more.

And now there is very little else which I can tell you about Joe Griffin and Martha Trumbles. Although the stable and pony were gone (for everything, you know, was to be, according to Martha's wish, as it was before she met Potter), yet I think the worthy brother and sister were really even happier than they had been before.

Martha made no more wishes during that portion of the hour which was left her after Potter's departure, or if she did they were only wishes unspoken in words, and which had for their object the gaining of that spirit of contentment which she was now well assured to be the only safe producer of happiness.

For many years to come she continued to live happily with her brother at Potter's Corner. Long since, however, they have passed away. And now, alas! the turnpike-gate itself has passed away also! The cruel men who change all the laws and customs

of dear old England have done this deed also; they have swept away our stage-coaches; they have inflicted upon us the necessity of hearing constantly from friends and creditors, by means of the penny post; they have forced us to go to France by steamers in an hour and a half, instead of by the good old sailing-boats, which gave us a pleasurable tossing during many hours; and now they are adding the last to the long catalogue of their crimes by abolishing our turnpikes! Potter's Corner turnpike is no more! But its name and its memories still survive, and happy shall I be if by this veracious chronicle I may have been able to hand down the one and the other to a grateful posterity, and to excite in the breasts of generations yet to come a well-deserved reverence and affection for the ancient and time-honoured name of Potter.

XII.

VALENTINE'S DAY.

I.

UPON one February day
  The cow grew tired of mooing,
And thought that she should like to bray,
  As neighbour ass was doing.

II.

The ass, fatigued with braying, quite
  Left his alluring thistle,
And vowed it should be his delight
  Like bullfinches to whistle.

III.

The bullfinch, of his piping tired
  And discontented growing,
With eager emulation fired,
  Took, like the cock, to crowing.

IV.

And the bold cock, with altered voice,
Forsook his usual habit,
And seemed extremely to rejoice
In squeaking like a rabbit.

V.

The rabbit like the dog did growl;
Puss, my informant teaches,
Changed voices with the midnight owl,
And rent the air with screeches.

VI.

The woolly sheep no more would bleat,
But, novel powers displaying,
The noble horse did counterfeit,
And persevered in neighing.

VII.

The horse, as if his voice had fled
From over-work, or hunting,
Did neigh no longer, but instead
Like to the pig was grunting.

VIII.

And the fat pig his usual tones
No more did groan or sob in,
But, planted on his marrow-bones,
Fell chirping like the robin.

IX.

The robin like the tyrant bull
Most horribly did bellow,
Till all the neighbourhood was full
Of terror at the fellow.

X.

Nor was the bull a bit behind,
Or at the thing embittered:
His notes he changed from harsh to kind,
And like the sparrow twittered.

XI.

The lion, casting roars aside,
The croak of frogs did try on,
Whilst Mister Frog, puffed up with pride,
Roared loudly like a lion.

XII.

The ducks with change were smitten too,
And, courage never lacking,
Attempted like the doves to coo—
The doves all took to quacking.

XIII.

The nightingale her tender throat
To raven's croak was bringing,
The raven left his harsher note,
Like Philomela singing.

XIV.

The mouse in caw of homely rook
Was consolation seeking,
Whilst he his cawing quite forsook
And like the mouse was squeaking.

XV.

Baa'd like a lamb the missel-bird,
Whilst, 'mid the laurel bushes,
The whistling of the lamb was heard
As loud as twenty thrushes.

XVI.

And, like the cow, the workmen all
Their voices set to *one* key,
And on their knees did wond'ring fall,
Each braying like a donkey.

XVII.

Now if we seek the "reason why"
Of this absurd vagary,
No doubt you think the blame must lie
With some malicious fairy.

XVIII.

But this was really not the cause
Of all the transformation
And changes in the usual laws
Which govern the creation.

XIX.

It was the morn of Valentine
Which, rising rather hazy,
The creatures did to change incline,
And drove them nearly crazy.

XX.

Each thought that to secure a mate
Upon that famous morning,
He'd better change his common state
Without the slightest warning.

XXI.

And so these birds and beasts you see
Chose this strange way of wooing,
Which threatened very soon to be
All Nature's work undoing.

XXII.

But, wiser than the rest, the owl
Despising all this folly,
Looked out with a reproving scowl
From 'midst her bush of holly.

XXIII.

"Ye birds and beasts!" she cried aloud
(Whilst all the time a-blinking),
"Ye clearly never were endowed
With common powers of thinking.

XXIV.

"Each choosing for himself a tongue
Which Nature has not given,
Forgets that all such gifts belong
Not to yourselves, but Heaven.

XXV.

"'Gainst Nature's laws if ye rebel
Your sin must be repented:
But, would ye wisely act, and well;
Just try and be contented."

XXVI.

She spoke with such a knowing hoot
That all, as one, uprising,
Became upon the instant mute—
Then followed her advising.

XXVII.

Each beast and bird resumed the voice
With which he had been gifted,
And all at once began rejoice,
And pleasant sounds uplifted.

XXVIII.

They thought upon the past with shame,
As some absurd delusion;
And never more that place became
The scene of such confusion.

XXIX.

A lesson all may learn from this,
So list to me, my brothers—
Don't think your own good gifts amiss,
Or envy those of others.

XXX.

The gifts which Heaven gives to you
They are not yours to boast of;
But evermore your whole life through
To try to make the most of.

XXXI.

And if with doubt or fear opprest,
Your fortune ne'er abuse it;
God knows, and gives you what is best,
'Tis *yours* aright to use it.

THE END.

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